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TO H. G. WELLS.

This work has been published at the expense of the Tulloch and Barr Publishing Fund, instituted as a Memorial of Lieut. William Tulloch and Capt. Hugh Barr, M.B., R.A.M.C., two members of the Fabian Society who lost their lives in the Great War.

# KARL MARX

## AN ESSAY

### I.

**N**O name in the history of social ideas occupies a place more remarkable than that of Karl Marx. Save Machiavelli and Rousseau, no thinker has been the subject of a condemnation so unsparing, and, like Rousseau, it has been his fortune to preside after death over a revolution conceived in his name. His books have received from a chosen band a scrutiny as earnest as ever the Bible or the Digest have obtained. Yet the precise grounds of the position he occupies among Socialists is a more complex problem than is usually assumed. His theory of value is no more than a formidable adaptation of a concept already worked out in full by a group of English predecessors. Men like Harrington and James Madison realized, hardly less clearly than he, the significance of the materialist interpretation of history. His appreciation of the fact of class antagonism had been anticipated in detail by Saint-Simon. Even his passionate sympathy with the inarticulate aspirations of the working class was no more profound than that of Charles Hall and Owen and John Stuart Mill.

His position, indeed, cannot be appreciated unless it is seen in its historical perspective. Born between two revolutions, he utilized the method produced by the reaction from the excesses of France to the service of its fundamental principles. The disciple of Hegel, he was the first of those who felt his master's influence to apply his dialectic to the analysis of social facts. Hardly less important was the material of which he made use. Beginning to write when the full implications of capitalism were becoming visible, he utilized its own description of its economic consequences as the proof of its moral inadequacy. The evidence was impressive and complete; and the induction therefrom of a social order at once new and inevitable, suited to a nicety the yearnings of his generation.

The main result of the Hegelian movement was to lend a new sanction to philosophic conservatism. The impact of the revolutionary wars seems to have turned the mind of its founder towards the justification of established order. In that sense, Hegel is a chief of reactionary romanticism, and his affinity to men like Burke and Savigny is obvious. Yet the essence of Hegelianism is, at the same time, the idea of evolution, and, to an age which, as with de Maistre, was chiefly concerned with finding the basis of a permanent social scheme the notion of evolution was a definitely radical one. For Hegel insists on the impermanence of institutions. Each age is its predecessor with a difference. There is a change of tone and outlook, a tendency to emphasize the antithesis of what has been characteristic of the earlier period. To the period of religious intensity there succeeds the age of religious indifference; Bossuet begets Voltaire, as Lord Eldon implies the reforming zeal of Henry Brougham. The law of life is the warring of contradictions, with growth as its consequence. This process, which Hegel called dialectic, is, as it were, a kind of rhythm which moves from the concrete hardness of some definite idea to its opposite; from that repulsion it shifts towards a synthesis in which the two first stages interpenetrate each other to form a new concept by their union.

This notion is the ruling method of Marxian thought. Obviously enough, it provides a means whereby the foundations of any given social system may be criticized at their base. For if we can be certain that any interpretation of a period is necessarily a partial view, we have only to emphasize its antithesis to call forth the possibility of a new standpoint. Hegelianism, for example, might insist on the moral adequacy of the Prussian State. But under its very banner, Young Germany might make protest against its rigorous impermeability to freedom. Where Hegelian doctrine had emphasized birth and position, Young Germany could point to the frustration of talent and the tragedies of the poor. Where it insisted on the value of religion, the newer thinkers might question the very foundations of faith. The disciples of Hegel, in fact, turned the weapons of their master to the service of a cause he had

denied. Strauss and Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Heine are essentially a part of the same general tendency of which Marx is the representative in social ideas. They are the heralds of revolt against the reaction. Their difference from Marx consists in their failure to see the political implications of their position. Marx grasped them from the outset; and the Hegelian dialectic in his hands is an effort at the overthrow of the existing social order.

The time, indeed, was singularly fitted for the ideas of which he was the protagonist. The shadow of two French Revolutions bestrode Europe like a colossus; and the very reaction they had provoked was compelled to make grudging concessions to ensure even its temporary survival. The mood of the people was everywhere bitter and discontented; and the criticism of existing institutions secured a widespread and eager welcome. In France, the work of Saint-Simon and Fourier and Enfantin had shown how prolific of novelty the revolution remained; and its influence was hardly less apparent in the new liberalism of Sismondi and the Catholic experiments of Lamennais. England was in the throes of a convulsion not the less profound because it was silent. Bentham had at last come into his own; and, under the stress of his urgent protests English institutions were being transformed into the organs of a middle-class state. The relics of feudalism had at last submitted to the assaults of Ricardo and his school; and the new-born industrialism, even if, to an observant eye, it seemed but the grim doctrines of Calvin translated to an economic sphere, completely altered the atmosphere of social life.

The revolution, indeed, did not achieve its purpose without suffering. As early as 1805, Charles Hall had uttered a remarkable protest against the implications of the new civilization and that half-forgotten school of economists who form a link between the individualism of Bentham and the co-operation of Owen, were riddling its protective armour in the name of social justice. The masses had regarded the Reform Act of 1832 as the prelude to the greatest happiness of the greatest number; and their disappointment expressed itself in the revolutionary activity of the trade unions and the formation of

the Chartist movement. Thinkers like William Thompson and J. F. Bray, noble-minded agitators like Francis Place and William Lovett, are every whit as indicative of the new capitalism as the great merchants and the incredible machines of Lancashire and Yorkshire. The Industrial Revolution reaped what it had sown. It ground a whole generation into intolerable despair, and dreams of its destruction were the sole refuge of its victims. Those dreams were the background which made possible the emergence of Karl Marx. They gave him the foundation of his social philosophy. ✓

## II.

Karl Marx was born at Treves on May 5th, 1818, of Jewish parents who were descended on both sides from rabbinic ancestors. Neither his father, who was a lawyer, nor his mother seems to have had any special ability; and Marx himself was the only one of several children who attained intellectual distinction. When he was six years old, the family was converted to Christianity, not, it appears, from any desire to avoid the stigma then attached to the Jewish faith, but as a result of that romantic idealizing of Christianity of which Chateaubriand was the most famous representative. It is not easy to measure exactly what influence this change had upon Marx. If it later opened to him avenues that would otherwise have been closed, he never availed himself of them. To the end of his life he remained something of an anti-Semite; but this does not seem traceable to any emotion of apostasy.

Marx's childhood was passed in the normal atmosphere of a patriotic lawyer's life. His father was a zealous Prussian, to whom the defeat of Napoleon offered the opportunity, of which his son did not take advantage, of a lyrical hymn to Prussian victory. He went to the grammar school of his native town, where his ability was immediately marked by his teachers. There, too, he was intimate with the Privy Councillor, von Westphalen, whose house was a kind of salon for the intellectual youth of Treves. At least Marx learned there a love of literature, and the dedication of his doctor's thesis is testimony to his grateful regard for his future father-in-law. For even before his departure, in 1835,

to Bonn University, he had become secretly engaged to Jenny von Westphalen, whose beauty and strength of mind had awakened in him an affection which did not diminish through life.

Marx remained a year in Bonn, studying jurisprudence; but he seems to have devoted himself to the more convivial side of the University, and it was not until his removal to Berlin, in 1836, that he threw himself into intellectual work. Berlin was then at the very height of its reputation; and the influence of Hegel was still paramount in its instruction. No sort of learning seems to have come amiss to Marx. History and philosophy, geography and jurisprudence, literature and æsthetic, all of them aroused in him the typical enthusiasm of an undergraduate in search of omniscience. Nor—it is a grateful thought—did he fail to write poetry; and if his verses are a fair index to his state of mind, he was full of a restless insatiability for knowledge, and a zealous desire to solve the problems of the universe, from which at least there must have been derived many hours of happy work. He tried his hand at composing philosophic systems. He attempted to compile an outline of jurisprudence. He went hardly at all into society, and it was not until the winter of 1837 that his experiments resolved themselves into a settled system. He surrendered the neo-idealism of Kant and took refuge in a complete acceptance of Hegelian metaphysic. That this change represented for him a very real mental crisis is evident from the passionate, if turgid, letter to his father of November 10th, 1837. There he summarizes the intense struggle through which he had passed, the desire “to dive into the deeps of the ocean . . . bringing up chaste pearls into the sunlight.” He was ill and troubled. His poems and short stories were burned; he sought escape from the seductions of Hegel in discussion at the Graduates’ Club, only to find himself the more securely enmeshed therein. It is the typical intellectual history of an ardent mind, conscious of great powers, and eager to secure a foothold from which to survey the universe.

Not unnaturally, it greatly disturbed his father. He, good man, was anxious above all to see Karl at work in a lawyer’s office, or, even better, in Government service.

Why did he not do as other students, attend his lectures, meet the right people, and embark upon his future career? He did not understand this mental torment save to see that it involved physical ill-health and a good deal of miscellaneous reading totally unconnected with the law. But Marx's ideals had already passed beyond so pedestrian an existence; and his father seems to have reconciled himself to the new ambitions. Marx determined upon a University post, and for that purpose devoted himself to the study of philosophic jurisprudence. With friends like Bruno Bauer and Friedrich Koppen, he buried himself in study and discussion. A thesis was written on the philosophical systems of Democritus and Epicurus, and in 1841 Marx became a doctor of the University of Jena. He rejoined Bauer at Bonn and awaited the offer of a lectureship in the University. Had that offer come, the history of European Socialism might have been very different. But the Prussian educational system did not look with affection upon eager young men whose views did not square with orthodox teaching. The post did not arrive, and it was shortly enough obvious that it was not likely to arrive. An academic career being thus impossible, Marx set to work to find a living in journalism, and in 1842 an opportunity of an attractive kind presented itself.

The first number of the *Rheinische Zeitung* was published on January 1st, 1842, and Marx was a warm friend of the editor, who had met him at the Graduates' Club in Berlin. Invited to assist, he wrote philosophical articles which not only brought him to the notice of a wider circle, among whom were men like Feuerbach and Moses Hess, but also secured for him the direction of the journal on the retirement of its first editor in the next October. Thereby Marx was compelled to deal, and for the first time, with immediate political issues. He came into contact with French and German Socialism, then in their Utopian stage. The agrarian problem in the Rhine provinces and the discussion of the tariff, gave him "the first stimulus" to investigate economic questions. French socialist ideas were already being discussed in the paper, but Marx, as always, determined upon a thorough grasp of the issue, did not as yet pronounce upon their worth. An editor who takes time to

make up his mind is obviously lost; and the directors of the paper decided to make a change in its management. Marx, who had just married, seems to have resigned without regret, and to have buried himself for the next two years in those economic studies from which he emerged a Socialist.

Of the inner history of those years we know practically nothing. Certain alone it is that as early as May, 1843, he detected within society "a breach which the old system cannot heal"; and it was not long before he showed in his letters an intimate knowledge of Fourier, Proudhon and Cabet. Already he had done with Utopias; the problem was "to explain the struggles and yearnings of the time." In the winter of 1843, when he had settled with his wife in Paris, he wrote the introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*, which remains, perhaps, his profoundest piece of technical criticism. Already he was thinking in terms of revolution, and insisting that the task of the proletariat was to free itself from the existing social order. Poverty he viewed, thus early, as the artificial product of a bourgeois society; and the denial of the right to private property had become for him the fundamental avenue of release. But we catch glimpses only of this time. All that can be said with certainty is the fact that reflection had made him a Socialist. He had realized, too, the inadequacies of the abstract remoteness of French Socialism. He had seen that the political state was, at any given time, the reflection in structure of the ideas of that epoch. He had realized that the main need was to make plain to the mass of men the implications of the state, and the end to which their half-conscious struggle should lead them. His thought, indeed, was abstract enough, and still fettered within the narrow walls of the Hegelian dialectic. But at least it was moving forward. ✓

Meanwhile, the problem of how to live had still to be solved. He had gone to Paris in October, 1843, to become editor of the *Franco-German Year Books*. But that periodical lasted only for a single issue, and, for Marx, its chief importance was the appearance therein of a long and, frankly, bad article by Friedrich Engels on political economy. The article led to correspondence between them, and in the autumn of 1844, Engels went

to Paris to visit Marx. That visit was the commencement of a friendship which even death did not terminate.

Friedrich Engels was the son of a rich manufacturer in the Rhineland. His father owned a cotton mill near Manchester, to which, in 1842, Engels had been sent to study English business conditions. He was already an eager critic of social conditions, and how carefully he observed the life about him, his *Condition of the Working Classes in England* in 1844, which he published in 1845, bears witness. A sympathizer with the Chartist Movement, and a contributor to Owen's *New Moral World*, he was exactly in the frame of mind to be receptive to Marx's ideas. And his personal qualities admirably fitted him to be the complement of Marx. Thoroughly loyal, without an atom of personal ambition, generous, and self-effacing, practical and energetic, he brought to Marx all the necessary characteristics of a *Fidus Achates*. His unstinting literary assistance hardly less than his constant financial aid were the materials which determined Marx's future career. It is, indeed, almost impossible to disentangle the labours of the two. Clearly enough, it was to Engels that Marx owed both his knowledge of English blue-books as a source of economic theory, and his introduction to the work of the English socialist school. Without Engels, too, it would have been difficult for Marx to undertake the research to which the first volume of the *Capital* bears witness; and the posthumous publication of the two latter volumes was the tribute that Engels paid to the memory of his master. That Marx would have been an important figure without Engels is clear enough; but the aid rendered by the latter made all the difference between the comparative calm of London and the restless wanderings of which hapless exiles like Bakunin were the miserable victims.

The sudden end of the *Franco-German Year Books* made Marx turn to more solid production. The *Holy Family* (1845) is important, not only because it contains the first clear outline of the materialistic conception of history, but also because its attack on Bruno Bauer is evidence that Marx had already broken with the young Hegelians. He had come to place all his faith in the significance of mass-movements, where Bauer believed

that the ideas by which mankind is moved cannot hope for more than superficial understanding from the mass and depend for their success upon the efforts of great men. Simultaneously, also, he was answering Rüge's attacks upon the German proletariat with an impassioned defence of socialism and revolution. Weitling is held up as proof of proletarian virtue against the mediocrity of the political literature of the German bourgeoisie. And in the polemic against Rüge it is insisted that the time for political revolution, the only revolution of which the German bourgeoisie is capable, had passed; the capacity of Germany is the capacity of its workers, and it is to a social revolution that Marx directs attention.

This Paris period is important not only for the advent of Engels. Mingling with the German workers then living in Paris, Marx naturally met those who were already in sympathy with his own views. From them to Proudhon was a natural step, for Proudhon was already the dominant socialist influence in France. Proudhon was interested in the Hegelian dialectic, and he and Marx spent countless hours in discussing its application to social science. But this fruitful intercourse was interrupted by his expulsion from France (January, 1845) at the demand of the Prussian Government. Marx went from Paris to Brussels, where he remained, but for short intervals, until the outbreak of the revolution of 1848. Engels gave him a selection of his library and Marx devoted himself to the composition of his singularly able and unpleasant criticism of Proudhon. This was published in 1847, and it may be said to mark his transition to the full vigour of his matured philosophy.

Proudhon's reputation as a social philosopher has undergone an interesting reconstruction in our own day.<sup>1</sup> As an economist he has hardly survived the analysis of Marx. A self-taught man, originally a printer, he came into prominence by the publication, in 1840, of his prize essay, *What is Property?* in which, with much brilliance of style and no small genius for paradox, he repeated in the economic sphere the substance of those criticisms of social organization which

<sup>1</sup> See A. Berthod, *Proudhon et la Propriété*; C. Bougle, *La Sociologie de Proudhon*; G. Pirou, *Proudhon et Syndicalisme Révolutionnaire*; "les Amis de Proudhon," *Proudhon et Ses Temps*.

Rousseau had expressed in a prize essay not less famous. But Proudhon's aspirations were not limited by his knowledge. With undoubted ability and with a real gift of social insight, he yet lacked that rigorous training in the method of intellectual inquiry without which the production of a logical system is rarely possible. Discovering the work of Hegel, he attempted an interpretation of social life in terms of the dialectic. It is, broadly, a mass of ill-arranged jargon with some brilliant asides. But the work was written while in contact with Marx, and the *Philosophie de la Misère* is the exposition of exactly that type of Utopia-mongering which aroused Marx's anger. It depended for its success mainly upon the unconscious ease with which it determines the most complex economic problems, and the reckless certitude of its own conclusions. It is, indeed, at the same time, a very attractive book. Proudhon realized, not less keenly than Marx, the evils of capitalism, and he was not less anxious to point the way to an economic order of which the motives were freedom and justice. In the *Du Principe Fédératif* and the *Justice dans la Révolution*, indeed, he outlined a type of federalism of which the suggestiveness is immense; and it would be legitimate to argue that not the least significant source of the ancestry of Guild Socialism could be traced to his writings.

But the conflict between Marx and Proudhon was an inevitable one. At bottom, the ideals of Proudhon were those of a peasant socialism, in which the authority of a central state was reduced to a minimum; he was reformist in outlook, despite the vigour of his phrases, and his economic views were always subordinate to certain ethical assumptions. Marx was the typical representative of the new industrialism, and the source of change for him was solely to be traced to developments in industrial technique. Authoritarian and materialist in both outlook and temper, there was no real contact between Proudhon and himself. Marx, moreover, was a trained scholar, to whom the luxuriance of Proudhon's speculations was never an adequate substitute for fact. He was able without difficulty to show that Proudhon understood neither the theory of value nor the process of production. At bottom, as he insists,

Proudhon had done little more than urge, first that labour was the source of value, and next that riches and poverty co-exist. Proudhon could see that the source of economic injustice lay somewhere within the system of production, but he could not, with any clarity, explain its development. Marx overwhelmed him with ridicule, abuse, and sarcasm, and it must be admitted that from the standpoint of an economist, right is on his side. And Marx's answer, the *Poverty of Philosophy*, is noteworthy also for its firm grasp of the economic processes of history and for his insistence upon the part that an oppressed class has always played in the development of any system founded upon class antagonism. But the main value of the book consists less in any positive doctrine that it announces than in the atmosphere by which it is permeated. It is definitely revolutionary, and it is revolutionary because it is historical. Its lesson is the argument that social evolution implies economic revolution. That was a new note to strike in the history of European Socialism.

### III.

The controversy with Proudhon was the natural prelude to the *Communist Manifesto*. It had been evident to Marx, for several years before 1848, that Europe was on the verge of revolt. England was passing through a period of intense agitation. Socialism was growing in Germany by leaps and bounds; and the lyrical falsifications of Lamartine seemed to the Paris workmen infinitely preferable to the mediocre corruption of Guizot and Louis Philippe. Marx, indeed, did not see that the political situation was far too complex to admit of an interpretation in uniform terms. Democratic nationalism like that of Mazzini, individualist republicanism like that of Ledru-Rollin, such hostility to dynastic oppression as Kossuth embodied, state socialism as typified by Louis Blanc—the forces of upheaval were too various and incompatible to admit of any continuous co-operation. Bitterly as the worker might resent the consequences of industrialism, he had not yet reached the stage where the seizure of political power for economic ends seemed to him the one ideal worthy of attainment. And he was, to no small degree, still

attracted by the kind of unrealistic thinking of which Robert Owen was so prolific, the sense that the difficulties of the time might be evaded by extra-political organization. Marx realized that this attitude was definitely unconstructive. The seizure of the State was to him the starting point of successful effort, and when Frederic William IV summoned the United Assembly in February, 1847, it was not unnatural for him to assume that the hour for action was at hand.

From the outset of his life in Brussels, Marx had mingled with the German socialist residents there. He had come into contact with the League of the Just, an organization of German workers with branches in the chief European towns. This society, founded in 1836, had in 1840 moved its headquarters to London, probably to escape the unwelcome attentions of the political police. The attention of the London group had been drawn to Marx by the members in Paris and Brussels. The London branch commissioned inquiries to be made about him, and when the first Congress of the League was held in London in the summer of 1847, Engels and Wilhelm Wolff, the latter, through Engels, a disciple of Marx, were present at its deliberations. Engels had spent the year in efforts at revolutionary propaganda in Paris and the Rhineland; and it is probably due, in the main, to him that the League of the Just was transformed into the Communist League. The ground was thus prepared for Marx, who appeared at the second Congress, also in London, in December, 1847. Engels had already conferred with him as to the ground to be taken there; and he had sent Marx the outline of a programme to be offered to the Congress for acceptance. Engel's outline contains the substance of the famous manifesto; but it lacks the ringing challenge and firm grasp of its successor. At the Congress, Marx and Engels were commissioned to draw up a programme. They were prepared for the effort; and the German edition of the *Communist Manifesto* appeared a few days before the outbreak of the Paris revolution.

It is not easy to over estimate the significance of the Manifesto. It gave direction and a philosophy to what had been before little more than an inchoate protest against injustice. It began the long process of welding

together the scattered groups of the disinherited into an organized and influential party. It freed Socialism from its earlier situation of a doctrine cherished by conspirators in defiance of government and gave to it at once a purpose and an historic background. It almost created a proletarian consciousness by giving, and for the first time, to the workers at once a high sense of their historic mission and a realization of the dignity implicit in their task. It destroyed at a stroke both the belief that Socialism could triumph without long preparation, and the hope that any form of economic organization was possible save that which was implicit in the facts of the time. It insisted upon no natural rights. It did not lay down any metaphysic. It was, on the contrary, a careful and critical historic survey of the institutional process regarded as a whole.

To insist upon its epoch-making character is not to regard it as an original or definitive document or to suggest that it is free from inconsistencies. It owes much, clearly, to Considerant's *Manifeste de la Démocratie* which was published four years before.<sup>1</sup> There have been Utopian socialisms in despite of Marx; and we are doubtless not at the end of them. The belief in natural rights revives with every age of discontent, and it would be possible to prove that the idea of natural rights is necessarily implicit in the juridical structure of Socialism. Nor is its treatment of the middle class at all adequate. At one point it is subject to a vituperation so scathing and relentless, as to make it seem the nurse of all social evil. At another its great historic achievements are exalted beyond all praise. Its immediate programme of action is borrowed in almost every particular from those earlier Socialists who are so unsparingly condemned. Nor can Marx's claim that he substituted "a critical insight into the facts, progress and general results of the actual social movement" for the systems of his predecessors, be entirely accepted; for, after all, it is not the least merit of Fourier and Saint-Simon that they had described with not less sober accuracy than that of Marx the economic conditions of their time. Even the use of the class-war as the key to

<sup>1</sup> But Considerant, though his picture of the economic situation is like that of Marx, rejects revolutionary communism.

history was brilliantly anticipated in the *Genevan Letters* of Saint-Simon.

Yet the general superiority of the Manifesto to previous Socialist writing is incontestable. It contains, broadly speaking, four definite groups of ideas. Beginning with a history of the growth of the middle class, it recounts its victory over feudal privilege, its emergence into the full development of capitalistic enterprise, and its necessary result in a revolutionary proletariat. A second section deals with the philosophic interpretation of this history. It argues that the doctrine of the class struggle, the necessary and inevitable conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, with the consequent revolutionary rôle that is assigned to the latter, are the plain deductions to be drawn. Ways and means are then discussed, the main object of which is to bring within the ambit of state control the whole economic life of the people. There then follows a criticism of previous Socialist literature of which it must be said that, forcible and eloquent as it is, much of it is inaccurate and the whole unfair. No description can do justice to the brilliant vigour of the whole. Every phrase of it is a challenge, and much of it has the same moving passion that distinguishes the exordium of the *Social Contract* or, in a very different type of polemic, the *Paroles d'un Croyant* of Lamennais. It is the book of men who have viewed the whole process of history from an eminence and discovered therein an inescapable lesson. It is at once an epilogue and a prophecy—an epilogue to the deception from which the workers suffered in the Revolution of 1789, and a prophecy of the land of promise they may still hope to enter. A movement that could produce a challenge so profound came hardly less to fulfil than to destroy.

It had hardly appeared before the Revolution broke out in Paris, and Marx, as a precautionary measure, was banished from Brussels by the Belgian Government. "Tyranny has banished you," wrote the French Provisional Government, "but a free France opens her gates to you." Marx proceeded to Paris, but remained there only a short time. Germany was already seething with revolt, and the natural vantage-ground for him was obviously the Rhineland. Gathering about him

the members of the Communist League, Marx went to Cologne where the editorship of the revolutionary paper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, was entrusted to him. Brief as was its life, its substance was not merely brilliant but of great significance as an indication of the Marxian tactic. Engels and Wilhelm Wolff were its chief contributors, and Freiligrath and Lassalle sent poems and essays. Mehring has published a selection of the chief articles of Marx in this paper. Dominantly, they insist upon three ideas: the disarming of the bourgeoisie, the erection of a revolutionary terror "to abridge and concentrate the hideous death agonies of society," and the creation of a revolutionary army. There is no room in Marx's thought, save perhaps as an ultimate, for any democratic system. Revolution opposes counter-revolution, and a reign of terror is the path to triumph. Liberty is dismissed as a purely bourgeois ideal, which impedes proletarian advance to its goal. The idea of a general upheaval, Russia linking hands with France, Berlin uniting with Vienna, is emphasized, though it should be added that Marx had no full realization either of the difficulties the Revolution would encounter, or the speediness of its destruction. The paper hardly lived for a year, when troubles with the censorship put an end to its existence, Marx left Cologne and returned to Paris, but only to witness the bloody suppression of the days of June. Banished by the French Government in July, 1849, to a remote corner of Brittany, he decided to move to London. Thither he went with his family, and he remained in England, with one or two brief intervals, for the rest of his life.

#### IV.

Marx's London period is, creatively, the most important part of his career; but it was a difficult and tragic struggle for existence, and his work was accomplished only by heroic effort. For the first ten years, the family was hardly over the verge of starvation, and Marx had even to pawn his clothes for necessary expenses. Nor was his intellectual environment easy. The disappointed makers of a revolution are never comfortable neighbours; and his pamphlet, *Herr Vogt*

(1860) is proof that German Communists did not differ from their fellows of France or Russia. For ten years (1851-60) Marx acted as European correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, a post which was the sole source of any continuous income. It was, however, very poorly paid, and if the selection of his articles therein published by Eleanor Marx after his death is at all representative, it is clear that the taste of the American reader has changed in remarkable fashion since the 'sixties. For Marx does not abate one iota of his convictions in his correspondence; and the manner of interpretation is that of the philosopher rather than the journalist.

That income apart, Marx had no consistent means of livelihood during his first ten years in London. Then came one or two family legacies, and a generous tribute from Wilhelm Wolff; later, Engels was able from his own means to allow Marx some three hundred and fifty pounds a year. Yet, with all their penury, these were not unhappy years. His wife seems to have had a real genius for deriving contentment from misfortune; judges like Heine and Paul Lafargue paid her the tribute of profound admiration. His children were growing up, and Marx was passionately fond of his children. Their nurse, Helene Demuth, was a source of infinite help and comfort, and there was always the sure knowledge of the inevitable triumph of the revolutionary cause.

For Marx did not share in the sense of depression which fell upon Liberals after the failure of 1848. He shut himself in the British Museum and, sometimes working sixteen hours a day, set himself to the composition of a socialist economics. One or two minor pamphlets were written, as the unsparing denunciation of the *coup d'état* of 1851, which he called the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) and the *Critique of Political Economy* (1859) which is important, in part because it is the groundwork of the *Capital* itself and in part because of the valuable light it throws upon his own conception of his method. But outside his relations with the international, it was to the *Capital* that these years were devoted. And they were years of unremitting and devoted service. He was at the Museum

as it opened and never left until the attendants turned him out. A chosen band of helpers, all fellow-exiles, used to accompany him and aid in the researches he conducted; though it should perhaps be added that they were not admitted as assistants until they had shown their agreement with Marx and passed certain craniological tests. Phrenology was not typical merely of the Utopian period of Socialism. Marx, moreover, never considered the exchange of conviction for comfort; offers of position came to him, as when Buchar sounded him, possibly on Bismarck's behalf; but he never dreamed of desertion. There is certainly no more remarkable instance of great sacrifice for intellectual discovery than that of which Marx's life is a record. Darwin, it is true, devoted twenty years to the testing of his hypotheses, but he had ample means at his command. Marx was surrounded by difficulties, of which not the least was the knowledge that his self-imposed task condemned his wife and family to profound suffering. Neither he nor they seemed to have flinched from the consequences, and one may judge not unfairly that their pride in his work was for Marx his happiest achievement.

Of Marx's intellectual environment in London, we know all too little. Men like John Stuart Mill he never met, though he was on friendly terms with the leading trade unionists as Odger and Applegarth. With the latter, however, he had no intimate political relations, and in the contemporary history of English labour, his name has no large place. That, perhaps, was natural enough; for English trade unionism was then a system of compromises with which Marx's revolutionary dogmas had little connection. For the most part his affiliations were with Engels and the German exiles in London, though only the former seems to have enjoyed his full confidence. He had, moreover, a close relationship with that mysterious figure, half-fanatic and half-knight-errant, David Urquhart, whose loathing of Russia Marx seems fully to have shared. Both of them saw spies at every street corner, and at one time or another, in each case without a shadow of justification, Marx was able to convince himself that Herwegh and Bakunin were government emissaries. It is, of course,

sufficiently intelligible that an exile who had himself been the object of police attentions should live in an atmosphere of nervous suspicion; but it is a regrettable corollary of Marx's accusations that both Herwegh and Bakunin belonged to different sections of the Socialist party. Marx never welcomed opposition or rivalry; and he was too prone to assume that a doubt of his rightness was a doubt also of his opponent's integrity. Yet it must be counted to his great credit in these years that he is in no small degree responsible for the sympathy shown to the North by the working class during the American Civil War. It was Marx who advised the union of the labour leaders with Cobden and Bright to arouse the enthusiasm of the trade unions; and it was Marx who proposed in the General Council of the International, that a vote of congratulation be sent to Lincoln, on his re-election as President of the United States. Marx played some part also in arousing the trade unions to protest against the brutal suppression by Russia of the Polish revolt of 1863.

But, apart from the preparation of *Capital*, Marx's chief occupation in London was with the early stages of the First International. In 1862 a group of Paris workmen paid a visit to the London Exhibition of that year. A trade union committee received them and a joint international Council was founded. When the Polish rebellion of 1863 broke out, it was this Council which prepared the gigantic protest meetings against Russian barbarity which represented the first intervention, failure though it was, of British labour in foreign politics. It was in connection with this campaign that Odger, a member of the Junta, suggested that the needs of the working class involved the holding of regular international meetings. The idea was taken up with enthusiasm and a great meeting was held in London in September, 1864, to organize the movement. Marx, who had held rather aloof from the initial stages, was present at the meeting, and joined the Founders' Committee that was created. He perceived at once the significance of the new movement, and, though he seems to have had little but contempt for its leaders, he was appointed to draw up the inaugural address. The Committee had given him a basis prepared by the French

delegates and accepted by it as adequate. Marx, characteristically enough, destroyed the basis, and produced instead an address of his own detailing the progress of the working class in England during the past thirty years, and insisting that its meaning must be read in terms only of his own theories. It is, in fact, a new edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, with the revolutionary period of trade unionism as the basis of its deductions instead of universal history. The special interest of the address, however, lies in Marx's use of the history of the Factory Acts as a proof of the value of working-class agitation. "In the bright sunlight of day," he said, "the bourgeois political economy was here vanquished for the first time by the political economy of the working class." The Factory Acts were, indeed, revolutionary in the sense that they were a direct admission of the inadequacy of *laissez-faire*; but their passage was hardly due to the type of influence Marx had in mind. At least in other moods he would not have called Lord Shaftesbury a revolutionary Communist.

Marx henceforward devoted much energy to the International, and as he hurried it forth from its cradle, so he may be said to have hastened it towards the grave. Its origin began in dissension—the struggle between the idealist nationalism of Mazzini and the revolutionary and class-conscious aggressiveness of Marx. On the latter's victory Mazzini withdrew, though with characteristic selflessness he advised his followers to continue their support. Marx henceforth dominated the organization, though he waged a continuous warfare to maintain his supremacy. To him, the movement was essentially an effort to propagate the ideas of the *Communist Manifesto* and thus to prepare the way for the revolution. But to the English members the International was essentially an organ for promoting trade unionism; and when Odger perceived, in the Commune of 1871 and Marx's defence of it, the real drift of its purpose, he resigned from the organization. The English section always remained aloof from the directorate; for it was that special brand of Radicalism of which William Lovett was perhaps the finest representative that they were really concerned to foster. Nor was the

English section the only difficulty. For the first two years, the followers of Proudhon were notable rivals, and they had no sympathy with Marx's idea of a direct and immediate political revolution. They were, moreover, hostile to Communism; and racial differences played their part. Even when the Proudhoniens had been defeated, Bakunin and his followers remained. They were anarchists and bitterly opposed to the centralized dictatorship of which Marx was the exponent; and there were grave differences between them on the degree to which property was to be confiscated. Bakunin, it must be admitted, was as difficult as Marx himself in collegueship. He founded a rival organization and did much intriguing against Marx when he was readmitted on its abandonment. By 1872 his influence had so increased that a frontal attack upon him was impossible. In the Hague Congress of that year, Marx therefore proposed the removal of the headquarters to New York. The motion was carried; but it was obviously impossible to direct European Socialism from a position three thousand miles away. By 1875 the International was extinct; and hostile as were the attentions given to it by the Governments of Europe, it rather perished of internal dissension, the struggle between two powerful and antithetic personalities, than from external attack.

Not, however, before it had rendered one great service. The Second Empire perished in the defeat of Sedan, and the provisional government created by Thiers was not merely hostile to a democratic re-organization, but even looked forward to the building of a new monarchy. The working men of Paris had no sympathy with these ideas; and the Commune was their answer to them. The effort lasted only seven weeks, when it was overthrown amid scenes of unexampled butchery. Marx had been definitely hostile to its inception. For him the essential function of the workers was to strengthen their own organizations and to prepare themselves thereby for their coming freedom. But when the Communards perished in their heroic folly, and were pursued, as even more modern history has pursued them, by a campaign of virulent and lying attack, Marx came to their defence in what is, the *Communist Manifesto* apart, the most brilliant pamphlet

he ever wrote. The *Civil War in France*, published as an official statement of the *International*, is, of course, a partial and incomplete view of the complicated events it narrates; but nothing that has been written since so admirably depicts the ideas and sentiments by which the Communards were inspired, or more energetically displays the savage brutality with which they were treated. The defence was the more generous when Marx's low opinion of the French Socialist movement is remembered, as also his conviction that Sedan was the just price of Bonapartist imperialism. Yet even in the hour of a victory he welcomed, Marx addressed the German workers in a manifesto which demanded a fair and honourable place for the vanquished.

Meanwhile, the great labour of his life had been partially completed by the publication, in 1867, of the first volume of the *Capital*. It cannot be said to have received the welcome it deserved. Written, of course, as it was in a German particularly cumbrous and involved in structure, it was necessarily caviare to the multitude. The *Saturday Review* perceived the value of the material of which it made use; though not even Professor Beesly's persuasiveness could induce George Henry Lewes to insert a long notice from Engels in the *Fortnightly*. Russian and French translations soon followed; and in Russia, particularly, the book soon made its way to that position of commanding influence it has never lost. Marx, it must be remembered, was already well-known in Russia. Belinsky had already praised the *Franco-German Year Books*; Annenkov had published a long critique from Marx on Proudhon; and his relations with Herzen and Bakunin had made him a notable figure among international Socialists. In Germany the book seems to have made its way but slowly; and the second edition (1873) contains a long protest by Marx against what he deemed an organized conspiracy of silence. It had, of course, presently to undergo the inevitable attack incidental to all learned German controversy—on the ground that its doctrines had been anticipated; and Marx was ludicrously assumed to have stolen his thunder from Rodbertus. But within five years from its publication *Capital* had become the pivotal part of German Socialist literature, and his

name assumed the position from which all other socialisms might be surveyed.

Marx, was not, however, destined to complete it. The long struggle against poverty had left its mark upon his frame, and the last twelve years of his life were an incessant fight against pain and disease. Asthma and inflammation of the lungs left him little chance of continuous work, though typically enough, he devoted his rest to the study of the Russian language that he might speak the more authoritatively upon its agriculture, and to such recreations as physiology and advanced mathematics. He wrote, too, in 1875, his *Criticism of the Gotha Programme*, which contains, perhaps, the clearest statement of his attitude towards the transition to Socialism. He was able, further, in 1877-8, to do something towards preparing the second volume of *Capital* for the press. But visits to Karlsbad and Algiers did not improve his shattered health; and he did not lift his head again after the death of his wife on December 2nd, 1881. To her, Marx had intended, as Engels has told us, to dedicate the completed structure of his work. He had no strength for the effort. On March 14th, 1883, he died peacefully, after a slight hæmorrhage of the lungs. His old nurse, Helene, and Engels were present at his death; and three days later he was laid to rest in the cemetery at Highgate. Engels and Wilhelm Liebknecht spoke at his graveside; and the former devoted the remaining twelve years of his life to completing the unfinished edifice of his master. Marx would have wished no other wreath upon his tomb.

## V.

Marx's personality is no easy one to dissect. There is no trace of the rebel in his inheritance; and his early education would have fitted him for any career rather than the one he chose. If he became the head and centre of the destructive forces of Europe, that was the inevitable outcome of the reactionary regime into which he was born; and he would doubtless have countered that description by insisting that destruction is the parent of creativeness. His work dealt with the historic foundations of the permanent source of revolution. and

the **only** weapon, as he realized, for flesh that has mortified is the knife. The view that makes of him the compeer of Darwin, the discoverer of the universal law of economic evolution, has not a little truth in it; but it is less true than that which places him alongside of Rousseau and Carlyle, as one of the great prophets of the human race.

For it is essentially by the qualities of the prophet that he is distinguished. He was unmoved by oracles other than his own. Impatient of difference, as with Proudhon and Bakunin, contemptuous, as his correspondence with Engels shows, of all who did not think exactly in his fashion, he never learned the essential art of collegueship. He was too prone to regard a hostile view as proof of moral crime. He had not a little of that zest for priority he was so unwilling to recognize in the discoveries of others. He was rarely generous in his recognition of intellectual stimulus. With Marx, to enter a movement was to dominate it; and he was incapable of taking the second place. "Hatred," wrote Mazzini of him, "outweighs love in his heart, which is not right even if the hatred may in itself have foundation." There is a penetrating truth in that criticism. Marx's absorption in the wrongs of the disinherited undoubtedly blinded him to the universality of human nature. He had brooded so long over the method of their redress, that he became incapable of weighing the value of alternative channels. He never realized how partial and incomplete were the views upon which he based his conclusions; and vast and patient as were the researches he undertook, he was not always exact in his measurement of evidence.

He is, in fact, a noble, but not an attractive figure. That there was a Marx eminently lovable in himself, the testimony of friends makes certain; but it was not the Marx of public life. There is something unhealthy in the venom with which he assails early friends like Bruno Bauer, or not less ardent seekers after light like Proudhon. His accusations against Proudhon, even when the temptation to destroy is remembered, were singularly ungenerous. Learned, courageous, capable of profound sympathy with the mass of men, he was never able to grasp the secret of dealing with individuals.

Much, doubtless, is to be pardoned to an exile who never enjoyed comfort, and had often risked his personal safety; but Mazzini was able to emerge from trials not less difficult with a sweetness unembittered. Nor could Marx accustom himself to the necessary compromises of political life. One is tempted to feel that Marx confined his introspection to other men, and never attempted that sober examination of self which is often the beginning of political wisdom.

That effort, after all, is fundamental. The unstated assumptions of a thinker's personality are the more urgent because they do not appear in the printed word. Every great philosophic interpretation is at bottom a spiritual autobiography, and Marx never realized how greatly his work is a palimpsest within which one can read the history of his personal experience. It is significant for his books that his early radicalism should have proved a barrier to his university career. It is significant also that he should have known the pains and penalties of exile. Nor is it irrelevant that, after thirty years in London, he was still, at the end, a German stranger testing facts and constructing theories in terms quite alien from the circumstances around him. The impalpable penumbra of his thought never impressed him, even while it remained the subconscious touchstone by which he judged the thought and acts of other men. Thus, while he wrote with superb profundity about the material environment of men's lives, he rarely penetrated into the inner substance of those lives. With such tracts of experience—religion for example—as were alien from his own knowledge he could neither sympathize, nor understand. He wrote a philosophy which expresses in the mass the aspirations of men; but it is not a philosophy, like that of Rousseau, which, with all its defects, springs directly from their deepest emotions. In a sense, that is to say, the seeming logic of his attitude is deceptive, for it in part rests upon a failure to test his own assumptions, and in part upon an abstract view of human nature with which the totality of facts is in direct contradiction.

Marx's doctrines may be divided into five different parts which, though they are brought into connection in his writings, have in reality no necessary dependence

upon each other. Their central economic position is a theory of value, by which he endeavoured to explain the methods by which the workers are exploited under capitalism; and as a corollary, a view of the increasing concentration of capital from which he derived important consequences in his prophecy of the future. Historically it is an attempt to explain the growth of movements and institutions entirely in economic terms. Predominantly, Marx insists, the antagonism of classes is the motive-power which underlies the historic process; and it is to the impulses which are at work in the satisfaction of economic demand that all changes are to be traced. Philosophically, this view results in a purely materialistic view of human nature—a view, be it noted, which has obvious and important connections with the general attitude of the Benthamite school. Politically, the doctrines of Marx resolve themselves into a defence of revolution as the method by which the workers are to attain to power, and dictatorship as the method by which they so consolidate it as ultimately to secure a condition of general freedom.

Upon Marx's theory of value it is not necessary to spend much time. It has not stood the test of criticism; it is out of harmony with the facts, and it is far from self-consistent. It represents essentially a narrow interpretation of some loose sentences of Ricardo. The latter had argued, with certain qualifications, that the value of any commodity is to be measured by the quantity of labour which goes to its production. Marx, however, ignored the qualifications, and the proof he offered of the thesis is essentially different from that of Ricardo. Exchange value, he argued, is not the singular quality of the commodity in which it inheres. Exchange value is the quality which it possesses alike with all other qualities for which it can be exchanged. Since human labour is the only quality which all commodities possess in common, human labour must be the measure of exchange value. And, be it noted, by human labour is meant "undifferentiated human labour," it is a quantitative and not a qualitative equation. It is a measure simply of effort in time and not of effort in result or quality of result. Labour is paid differently simply in relation to the different amount of labour "congealed"

in any given commodity produced. That which will suffice to produce the necessities of life for the labourer is therefore the price of labour power. Wages, as it clearly follows, are the value of the worker's necessities of life. But the worker produces in a day more than suffices for his necessities of life. If we assume that by working six hours each day the worker can produce his necessities, while his working day is eight hours long, then the value of what he produces is as eight hours is to six, is, that is to say, one-third greater. Marx termed this extra-production surplus-value, and he assumed that the capitalist, taking his surplus as his profit, robbed the worker of it. For by buying labour-power at its market price, the capitalist at once grows rich and exploits his workers. And in any capitalistic society, especially where there is free competition, this is bound to be the case; from which it of course follows that only by the abolition of capitalism can we stop the exploitation of labour.

It is unnecessary to dwell at any length upon the fallacies implicit in this analysis. As a matter of logic, Marx had no right to assume that the quality of labour is, other differences being subtracted, the common basis of measurement. Nor did he mention that in addition to labour, all commodities to have value must have this at least in common, that they satisfy some need. Utility, in other words, is a necessary factor in value; it would be impossible to produce aeroplanes except upon the assumption that some people wanted to fly in them. Nor can "undifferentiated human labour" be taken as a measure of value. It is an economic platitude that differences in wages are not merely due to differences in the effort in time of production. It costs no less to produce a bad carpenter than a good one, but the quality of a good carpenter's work has a value quite apart from cost as effort; it has the type of value which the economists call a quasi-rent, and this quasi-rent appears in the value-in-exchange of the product.

Nor is this all. Wherever there is a type of production the phenomena of which result in rent, the measurement of value is not the mean cost of production but the marginal cost of production. Marx failed to note this limitation, with the result that he cannot under-

stand the nature of rent and was led into obvious contradictions.<sup>1</sup> And he fails also to take any account of the fluctuating character of demand. He seems to have regarded demand as purely static, and falls, as a consequence, into all the difficulties which Bohm-Bawerk and the Austrian school have emphasized. To say, moreover, with Marx that the "cost of a labourer is the socially necessary cost," the lowest cost, that is, at which he can be produced, is immediately to bring within purview tests of his hypothesis which he entirely failed to apply. For if wages represent the cost of necessities, the existence of a proletariat whose wages are above the bare cost of necessities clearly invalidates the whole process. And, in fact, the question of a wages level is an historical problem in which logical considerations do not play the whole part. Social conscience, for example, as with the Trade Boards, may insist upon a rate of wages historically above "the socially necessary cost," and trade unions may by the combined strength they represent, lead to the same result. If a state, even though it be a capitalistic state, chose to adopt a policy of a minimum basis of civilized life, in which a wage-standard was fixed, the iron law of wages, which Marx deduced from his theory of value, would immediately be obsolete.

It must not be forgotten, moreover, that in the Marxian analysis whatever does not appear as wages, is always regarded as unearned profit. Of rent and interest this is, perhaps, no unfair account, but it is outside the evidence of facts to argue that the task of directing business, the work of the entrepreneur, is not to count as labour and does not create value. Even when a suspicion of this impossibility dawned upon Marx, he dismissed the earnings of direction simply as cunning,<sup>2</sup> and argued that all profits contain an element of surplus value which differs from interest, wages and payment to the entrepreneur. But if profits are not a payment for work then it should surely follow that the capitalist must take it also; otherwise he is gifted with a quality of moderation with which Marx does not normally endow him.

<sup>1</sup> See *Das Kapital*, Vol. III, pp. 180-1 and 192, for an example of two quite different theories of rent within a dozen pages.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III (German edition) Part I, p. 343 ff.

In such a general background, the Marxian theory of value seems clearly untenable not less on theoretic grounds than from an analysis of the facts of business. Yet it is equally undeniable that Marx's view has obtained the assent of a whole class of society to its truth; and it is, therefore, worth while for a moment to inquire exactly what magic it possesses from which its strengthening hold is derived. That, it may be suggested, is simple enough. For the technical economist, the difference between profits and rent was fundamental. Men like Ricardo and Nassau Senior saw a natural distinction in source of origin which manufacturers like Bright embodied in the legitimate earnings of a hardworking mill-owner, whatever his wealth, and the illegitimate because unearned income of a land-owning duke. They saw it the more clearly when, as in the period of Marx's own maturity, they were struggling to free his business from the environment of a hostile squirearchy. But to the labourer, as Marx clearly saw, such a distinction was for practical purposes irrelevant. The world was divided for him into those who lived by wages and those who did not. Those who lived by wages were poor, those who did not live by wages were rich. Assume, as Marx assumed, that the surplus theory of value is true, and the riches of those who do not live by wages are due to the poverty of those who do. The worker was able to see that he was poor; he saw also that he produced more than he could consume, and that his surplus production was divided among a relatively small class of rich, and often idle, men. A theory such as Marx's inevitably appealed to him as the natural explanation of his oppressed condition. He clung to it, not by virtue of any logical estimation of its theoretic adequacy, but because it summarized the most poignant experience he knew. The Marxian law of wages, moreover, will, from its very nature, win new adherents at every period of commercial depression. At any moment when there is a decline in the effective demand for commodities, or when the strength of trade union resistance is at a low ebb, the impact of capitalism upon the wage-earner will closely resemble what Marx insisted is its normal relation; for few business men have imagination enough to realize that there are other ways to the re-

habilitation of markets than the reduction of price by means of lower wages. Inevitably, therefore, the worker will move from the acceptance of surplus value to the philosophy which Marx constructed as its natural environment.

The law of the concentration of capital stands upon firmer ground. The greater the degree of complexity involved in the productive process, argues Marx, the fewer will be the number of persons controlling its instruments. Everything contributes to the intensification of this process. New means of communication are established, the problems of which are beyond the solution of the small capitalist. Important mechanical inventions are beyond his financial means. Territorial consolidation destroys the local market in which he was once a privileged person. The process, indeed, is neither immediate nor direct. It took the bourgeoisie three centuries to expropriate the artisan and create the proletariat. But once the process had begun, the development was inexorable. Over production created a new army of reserve workers. The substitution of pasture for arable farming concentrated a large rural population in the towns. The economies of large scale production forced hitherto independent producers into the ranks of the wage-earners. The capitalistic system moves from a national to an international character; its market becomes the world. Its nature involves increasing centralization, until the control of the forces of production reaches a point where its further development in private hands is impossible. For alongside the development of accumulation is the increase of the proletariat. The workers cannot any longer endure the misery that is involved in the capitalist regime. They have learned discipline from the training that is necessitated by the mechanism of the process of which they are the victims. "The knell of capitalist private property then sounds. The expropriators are expropriated." To the great capitalist there succeeds the state, which is captured by the workers for their own purpose. The result of capitalism is, in fact, its own destruction. It produces, in Hegelian fashion, its own antithesis. The very condition of its growth is that it should involve the laws which imply its inevitable ruin.

We need not accept the conclusion of the argument to insist on the important truth that it contains. The wastage of competition in large scale enterprise is a commonplace of modern business, and the trust or cartel is the characteristic symptom of industrial development. There are, indeed, certain important limitations to the simplicity of the Marxian view. The growth of joint stock enterprise distributes over a wider circle the number of those interested in the receipt of profits, even while it limits those who actually control the industrial process itself; while there are many minor industries, of which photography and the repair of motor-cars are examples, in which the tendency is to the increase of small firms rather than to the development of great ones. But parallel with this evolution has gone a very striking centralization of credit which concentrates in continuously fewer hands the finances of the community. Agriculture, indeed, despite the large-scale farming of Western America, and the development of agrarian co-operation, remains persistently individualist in temper.<sup>1</sup> Yet, on the balance of inquiry, it is impossible to deny the emergence of an increasingly collectivist spirit. And its reaction upon industry is the more important because it leads, without question, to the demand by the workers of certain nominal standards from the state which are increasingly insisted upon as the condition of business enterprise. Nor is that all. It becomes obvious that certain industries are, from their very nature, too vital in their results to be left to the chaotic possibilities of private effort. If the expropriators are not actually expropriated, there comes, as with mines and railways, a demand for some form of nationalization, and just as the investigations of the 'thirties and 'forties produced the Factory Acts, so it is legitimate to argue that the results of inquiries like the Coal Commission of 1919, and the Dockers' Inquiry of 1920, are likely to put a term to the continuance of private enterprise. Capitalism, in fact, prepares monopolies which immediately affect the community towards some form of state administration.

So regarded, of course, this view does not involve the theory of revolution which Marx regarded as the inevit-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Herman Levy, *Large and small holdings* (1911).

able corollary of capitalistic concentration. It need not, indeed, involve a transition towards a socialistic state at all. All that would seem to be implied would be the removal of industries essential to the welfare of the community from the danger of exploitation by private interests. The logic of a necessary conflict resultant upon the concentration of capital is derived by Marx from other sources. It is the corollary of his interpretation of history. That, broadly speaking, may be summarized by saying that all the phenomena of history are the result of economic conditions. To them are traceable legal and social institutions not less than the religion and philosophy of each age. The system of production is the ultimate factor, in short, by which the mass of human relationships is determined. Protestantism, Engels wrote, is "essentially a bourgeois religion"; so too, in a feudal period we should expect the legislation to reflect not general ideas of right, but those ideas of right which are compatible with the maintenance of feudalism. But ideas change, and in Marx's view, the source of change is to be discovered in the transformation of one economic system into another. A new external world produces new internal ideas. Let women enter industry in the mass and, as Mr. Bertrand Russell has pointed out, ideas which not even the logic of Plato and Stuart Mill could make obvious, become accepted without question. Two hundred years ago, it was unthinkable that a peer should go into the city; to-day, finance has enmeshed political life within its fold, so that no company prospectus is complete until the peerage is represented there.

No one can doubt the very large measure of truth in this outlook. No one can write the history of English Puritanism, of the struggle for toleration, or of the American Revolution, without making the defence of an economic incentive fundamental to their explanation. But it is equally clear that the insistence upon an economic background as the whole explanation is radically false. No economic conditions can explain the suicidal nationalism of the Balkans. The war of 1914 may have been largely due to conflicting commercial imperialisms; but there was also a competition of national ideas which was at no point economic. Historically, too, the

part played by religion in the determination of social outlook was, until at least the peace of Westphalia, as important as that played by material conditions. Luther represents something more than a protest against the financial exactions of Rome. The impulses of men, in fact, are never referable to any single source. The love of power, herd-instinct, rivalry, the desire of display, all these are hardly less vital than the acquisitiveness which explains the strength of material environment. Engels, indeed, seems to have realized the narrowness of the orthodox view, for in the later years of his life he insisted that the dominant part ascribed by Marx to the economic system was due mainly to its neglect by his opponents, "and there was not always time, place and opportunity to do justice to the other considerations."

But with Marx the economic system is not only final, it is final in a particular way. "The only durable source of faction," said Madison, "is property," and, for Marx, the emergence of private property in history is the beginning of the class struggle. Immediately society can be divided into those who do, and those who do not, possess private property, a power is released which explains the changes of history. For the class which possesses property moulds the civilization of that society in the service of its own interests. It controls the government, it makes the laws, it builds the social institutions of the commonwealth in accordance with its own desires. Slave and free man, master and servant, these have been the eternal antitheses of history. With the advent of capitalism the struggle is at once simplified, and made more intense. Thenceforward, the final stage of the class-war, the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, emerges. And just as each social order of the past has secreted within its womb the germ of its successor, as for example, feudalism produced capitalism, so does the latter contain within itself the germ of its communist successor. "Capitalism," said Marx, "produces its own gravedigger." The conflict, in his view, was an inevitable and a bitter one, and it was bound to result in the victory of the proletariat. "The bourgeoisie," he wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, "is incapable of continuing in power

because it is incapable of securing a bare subsistence to its slaves"; and the result is a growing sense of revolt in the worker who ultimately, by a revolutionary act, assumes the reins of power.

In a large sense, it is obvious that the substance of this interpretation is accurate. The fact of the class-struggle, as Marx himself pointed out, is a commonplace of historians and economists; and it may be added that to deny its importance is to make history unintelligible. Where Marx parted company with his predecessors was in the deductions he drew from his perception of its significance. For whereas with men like Madison and Guizot, the fact of conflict produced a sense of horror at its implications, and a search for a technique that its dangers might be obviated, with Marx the conflict was fundamental and both its method and ultimate outcome were to him alike obvious. Whereas with Madison there is an ever present uncertainty whether a just victory may not suffer betrayal, or a wrong object be pursued, with Marx the process is predetermined and, save for a brief period in 1870, no hesitation seems to have crossed his mind.

The method by which the proletariat was to secure power lies at the very root of Marx's doctrine; and it has been in our own day, perhaps, the main source of his influence. The method was revolution, and a dictatorship of iron rigour would consolidate the new system until the period of transition had been effectively bridged. Marx did not blind himself to what all this implied. The history of capitalism was the history of a relentless defence of each phase of the rights of property. They were maintained by methods at each point unconnected with ethical demands. If the conflict was extreme as in the days of June, 1848, or with the Commune of Paris, the last ounce of misery was wrung from its opponents, that capitalism might be secure. A period of comparative quiescence may produce the concession of social reform, but this is merely deception. Once a really vital point is touched by the workers' demands, they are met by armed resistance. That means, of course, that only by conscious violent intervention can communism be realized. The proletariat must seize a propitious moment for the revolution; but until it

comes, they must do all in their power to disturb the existing regime. Even if minor successes have been achieved by the aid of the liberal-minded bourgeoisie, "from the first hour of victory, the workers must level their distrust against their former allies." They must create a working-class organization of their own, workers' committees, local workers' councils, to oppose proletarian institutions and their influence to those of the middle-class state. The Communists must arm the proletariat and do all they can to cut down the army of the State as the chief weapon of defence possessed by the bourgeoisie. Where the workers are in the militia, they must form within it a secret organization to obtain its control. They must form their own independent, if hidden, military force and acquire arms by every method. Influential democrats to whose word the working class seems to respond, must be discredited. The old social order, in fact, must be attacked at every point. Communists have two functions only, to prepare for the revolution, and to consolidate it successfully when it has been prepared. They must think of themselves not as realizing an ideal, but only as setting free the elements of a new society concealed within the womb of the old.

The period of consolidation, moreover, must be a period of iron dictatorship. Marx had no illusions about the possibility of a democratic governance in such an hour. The ideals of freedom were impossible to maintain until the ground so conquered had been made secure. Revolution provokes counter-revolution; and a victorious proletariat must be on its guard against reaction. Revolution, in fact, demands of the revolutionary class that it secure its purpose by every method at its disposal. It has neither time nor opportunity for compassion or remorse. Its business is to terrorize its opponents into acquiescence. It must disarm antagonism by execution, imprisonment, forced labour, control of the press. For as it cannot allow any effort at the violent overthrow of what it has established, so must it stamp out such criticism as might be the prelude to further attack. Revolution is war, and war is founded upon terror. The methods of capitalism must be used for the extinction of capitalism. For as capitalism has

made of life itself the cheapest of commodities, there need be no repining at its sacrifice, and the result, in any case, is worth the cost, since it destroys the possibility of future sale. It would have been a wanton betrayal of trust, said Marx of the Paris Commune, to observe the traditional forms of liberalism. The end, in fact, is too great to be nice about the means employed.

Nor can we expect that a peaceful revolution is possible. While Marx had certain doubts of England, on the whole he was certain that a violent struggle was inevitable. The workers might capture Parliament at the polls; but political power of that kind is in any case a shadow, and were it used for an assault upon property, it would inevitably provoke an armed resistance. Marx, indeed, went further and was openly contemptuous of democracy. It was a bourgeois invention unrelated to the real, and used only to deceive the people. Again and again the proletariat is betrayed; and throughout Marx's writings there is the assumption that reliance must be placed upon a class-conscious minority. For in his view there is no place in history for the majority principle; the record of States is the clash between determined minorities, contending for the seat of power. To introduce considerations of consent, to wait on in the belief that the obvious rightness of communist doctrine will ultimately persuade men to its acceptance, is entirely to ignore reality. The mass of men will always acquiesce in, or be indifferent to, whatever solutions are afforded. Communists must proceed upon the assumption that nothing matters save the enforcement of their will.

Upon the end this revolution is to serve, the forms its purpose will adopt, Marx has written but little. Obviously, with justice on his side; for speculation in distant historical futures is the worst form of gambling. It was with the destruction of capitalism and the period of transition therefrom that he was mainly concerned. A new productive system was bound to involve new institutions which no man could foresee. That the Communist maxim, "From each according to his powers, to each according to his wants," would become operative was, of course, obvious to him; that performance would be measured in terms of labour-time (a possibly incon-

sistent hypothesis) he took for granted. But he was always emphatic that the future must settle itself. He insisted that the measure of distribution would be necessarily unequal in the period of transition. You may, as he saw, destroy by catastrophe, but creation is not an immediate and spontaneous process. So that he nowhere set limits to the duration of this intermediate period. It was necessary to wait until the habits engendered by a new productive system created a psychology in which the dogma of equality superseded the bourgeois hypothesis of individual rights. The main thing was the destruction of a regime in which class-distinction made possible the servitude of the many. It was possible to have confidence in an order in which the whole force of social effort was deliberately placed at the disposal of the common welfare.

## VI.

A generation which has seen this doctrine supported by machine-guns and bayonets is unlikely to belittle its importance. Nor can it be denied that not a little of social evolution has taken the course Marx predicted. Anyone who reads the history of the industrial struggle in Colorado or West Virginia will find it difficult to discover a limit of unreason which capitalism is not willing consistently to overpass. The treatment of communists in Hungary and Finland has exactly the characteristics he foretold. An isolated community like the miners of South Wales becomes, naturally, communist in the background of incompetence and ill-treatment from their employers. And representative government, at least in its classical form, seems unlikely to justify the high hopes of its Benthamite exponents. Every country in the world that has experimented with universal suffrage has experienced a sense of disillusion. It is even commonplace to argue that reason has little place in political struggle, and to pin faith to an irrational impulse which seeks no more than the satisfaction of individual desire. If there has been an improvement in the general standard of civilization, an increasing unwillingness, for example, to inflict unnecessary pain, there are no signs of the mitigation of the class-conflict. On the contrary, the events of the last decade point

directly to its exacerbation; and we have obviously entered upon a period in which the rights of property are challenged at their foundation. Certainly it is unquestionable that the purchase-price of capitalist survival is the offer of concessions which a generation ago would have seemed not less unnecessary than unthinkable.

Yet the approximation of the general atmosphere to the condition Marx had in view hardly justifies the principles upon which he placed his reliance. To begin with, the preparation for revolution is a qualitatively different problem from what it was in the days of the Paris barricades. It is possible in a mood of defeat for a civilian population to destroy a regime which the army and navy no longer uphold, and, as was demonstrated long ago by Cromwell, a military force which is dissatisfied with its civilian superiors can without difficulty become their master. But for a party of men in the position of communists in the modern State, the situation is very different. Unless they are the majority and, consequently, the government, the hostility of the army and navy is certain. Nor can they obtain, on any large scale, the necessary equipment for insurrection. They would have to obtain control of the national arsenals; and that would mean the dispersion of forces in any case small by hypothesis. They would have to meet in the people at large at least a mood of acquiescence. They would have to guarantee a supply of food, which, in any but a dominantly agricultural society, would be practically impossible if international credit was seriously impaired by the revolution. Even if we regard a general strike as tantamount, in the conditions of modern industry, to a revolution the difficulties are overwhelming. A general strike might well succeed as a protest against war, for its penumbra might, in the future, arouse emotions of determination that would be irresistible. But upon any less dramatic issue, it seems tolerably certain that once again, the army and navy must be in the control of the strikers if success is to be assured. \*For a modern army can supply all services connected with transportation; it can secure the distribution of food, and the problem of fuel is becoming less and less a matter of mining coal. The Marxian view

of a secretly armed minority assuming power at a single stroke is unthinkable in the modern state. It would have to imply either the existence of a government so weak that it had practically ceased to be a government at all, or, what is perhaps, an equivalent, a population actively sympathetic to the revolutionary minority. The resources of publicity in modern civilization make impossible the private preparation of the gigantic effort assumed by the Marxian hypothesis.

But this is only the beginning of the difficulty. Marx assumed throughout his analysis a system of compact states the life of which was mainly determined by economic considerations, and each relatively independent of its neighbours. Each of these assumptions is only partially true of the modern world. A State like England, which is wholly dependent on foreign trade, could not undergo a successful revolution except upon the assumption that her neighbours viewed its results with benevolence. Such an attitude on the part, for instance, of America is very unlikely, and the rupture of Anglo-American trade would be fatal to any revolution in this country. Nor is that all. It is quite clear that the division a revolution would imply must, in its workings, be very partially determined by economic considerations. In a country like America, for example, there would be at least three other factors of vital importance. An American communist revolution would have to cope with ~~problems~~ of distance which would probably render it abortive at a very early stage. It would not, as in France, be a matter of the immense impact of the capital on the life of the nation; Washington is relatively insignificant in the perspective of America. To control the whole continent would involve controlling the most complicated railway system in the world. And even if that difficulty could be surmounted, a complex of nationalist differences would have to be assuaged. German, French, English, Irish, Polish, these have their special characteristics which the American capitalist has been able to exploit to their common disadvantage; it is difficult to see how an appeal to a communist minority of each would result in the transcendence of these differences. Even then, the religious problem remains; and the hold of the churches upon the

mind, particularly, of the Latin peoples would not be easy to loosen. For Marx, insisting only upon the economic motive, it is easy to ignore these difficulties, but it is far too narrow an outlook not to realize at the outset that appeal can be made to other incentives every whit as strong. And even if it were argued that Marx could in our own time assume that the day of such prejudice as nationality and religion engender is passing (which is doubtful), and that the barriers built by economic difference are now alone important, his conclusions would not follow. For in a period of universal suffrage, it ought then to be possible to capture the seat of power at the polls, and throw upon the capitalist the onus of revolting against a socialist democracy.

There are, however, other approaches to the problem which Marx did not adequately consider. There is, in the first place, the general result upon society of the practice of violence, particularly when the destructive nature of modern warfare is borne in mind; and, in the second, there is the special psychological result upon the agents of the opposing forces in such a regime. Marx did not consider these possibilities, in part because he judged that, in any case, the conflict was inevitable, and also because he was convinced that whatever sacrifices had to be made would be ultimately justified by the result. Such an attitude is, of course, simply an instance of his general failure to weigh sufficiently the substance of a political psychology. In part, also, it is the corollary of a determinism which the facts in issue at no point justify. For it is obvious that if revolution, with its attendant violence, is justified for any cause in which you happen to believe profoundly, no modern state can hope for either security and order. The war has shown clearly that the impulses of savagery which are checked by peace are, when loosed, utterly destructive of the foundations of a decent existence. If life became an organized and continuous jacquerie, civilization could quite easily be reduced to the state where, as in Mr. Wells's imaginary but far from impossible picture, some aged survivor may tell of an organized Europe as a legend which his grandchildren cannot hope to understand. Violence, on the grand scale, in fact, so far from

proving an avenue to communism, would be the one kind of existence in which the impulses demanded by a communist state had no hope of emergence. For the condition of communism is the restraint of exactly those appetites which violence releases; and Marx has nowhere indicated how this difficulty could be met.

Even beyond this issue, a further point must be raised. Marx has assumed the seizure of power, and a period of rigorous control until the people are prepared for communism. But he has not shown what approximate length that period is to be, nor what certainty we have that those who act as controllers of the dictatorship will be willing to surrender their power at the proper time. It is a commonplace of history that power is poisonous to those who exercise it; there is no reason to assume that the Marxian dictator will in this respect be different from other men. And, *ex hypothesi*, it will be more difficult to defeat his malevolence since his regime will have excluded the possibility of opposition. No group of men who exercise the powers of a despot can ever retain the habit of democratic responsibility. That is obvious, for instance, in the case of men like Sir Henry Maine and Fitzjames Stephen, who, having learned in India the habit of autocratic government, become impatient on their return to England of the slow process of persuasion which democracy implies. To sit continuously in the seat of office is inevitably to become separated from the mind and wants of those over whom you govern. For the governing class acquires an interest of its own, a desire for permanence, a wish, perhaps, to retain the dignity and importance which belong to their function; and they will make an effort to secure them. That, after all, is only to insist that every system of government breeds a system of habits; and to argue as a corollary therefrom that the Marxian dictatorship would breed habits fatal to the emergence of the regime Marx had ultimately in view. The special vice of every historic system of government has been its inevitable tendency to identify its own private good with the public welfare. To suggest that communists might do the same is no more than to postulate their humanity. And it may be added that if they surrendered power at a reasonable time, the grounds for so doing, being obviously in their

nature non-economic, would thereby vitiate the truth of the materialistic interpretation of history.

All this, it is worth noting, is to omit from consideration the ethical problems that are involved. It is obvious, for example, that it involves the complete erosion of the whole historic process. But the erosion of responsibility in the governing class is the destruction of personality in their subjects. In such a regime notions of liberty and equality are out of place. Yet it is obvious that the two main defects of capitalism are its failure to produce liberty and equality for the mass of humble men and women. Marx, that is to say, contemplated a condition which reproduces exactly the chief vices of capitalism without offering any solid proof of their ultimate extinction. For, after all, the chief effort that is worth making is towards a civilization in which what Mr. Graham Wallas has termed, "the capacity of continuous initiative," is implied in the fact of citizenship. It is clear enough that the possibility upon which the existence of that capacity turns is a wide distribution of power. A man whose thought and acts are at the disposal of other men is deprived of his personality, and that deprivation is implied in the rigorous centralization to which Marx looked forward. Unquestionably, he was right in his insistence that the distribution of economic power in a capitalist state makes the enjoyment of such personality impossible to most; but it does not seem any more likely to emerge in the successor to it that he contemplated. We may go further and argue that it is impossible in any state where the main purpose of, and motive to, effort, is the increase of material wealth. No society can realize itself in any full sense of the word until the mainspring of its existence is a capacity to value things of the mind as more precious than material commodities. That involves a sociology in which the economic motive which Marx emphasized is appraised at a low level. Obviously, to achieve the condition in which that appraisal is possible, involves an educational system far different, both in scope and purpose, from what we now have. It involves a complete transformation of values, in which things like the wider appreciation of art, the study of science and philosophy, the release, in short, of the creative energies of men from

their present bondage, are regarded as the main and immediate effort of political organization.

Yet, if historic experience is to count for anything—and Marx's philosophy is nothing if not the interpretation of historical experience—it is exactly this transformation of values which cannot take place in the development Marx had in view. The barbarian invasions of Rome did not produce a great art and a great culture, they produced the dark ages. The Thirty Years' War impeded constructive effort in Germany until the threshold of the nineteenth century. Nor has our own experience been different. The idealism of 1914 has perished before the greater strength of the purely destructive forces released in the struggle. What we have realized is how tenuous and fragile are the bonds of civilization, how little likely they are to be reinforced by any effort save that of peace. In such a background, the conflict that Marx envisaged looms before us as the harbinger of precisely those evils from which we are seeking release. It emphasizes in men the impulses against which civilization is a protest. That wrong can be wiped out with wrong, that we are to regard ourselves as the victims of blind and impersonal forces against which it is useless to strive, that the possessive impulses of men cannot be transcended by creative effort—these and things like these are a gospel of impossible despair. In that aspect, surely, the older socialists were right who made the basis of their creed a doctrine of right and fraternity and justice. For right and fraternity and justice imply love as their foundation; they do not spring, even at the last vain striving, from a doctrine founded upon hate.

## VII.

The real power and influence of Marx lie in a direction essentially different from what is generally assumed. He was the first thinker to expose in all its hollowness the moral inadequacy of a commercial civilization. He showed that in any society where the main effort is the attainment of wealth, the qualities that are basically noble cannot acquire their full vigour. He did, in fact, for the economic relationships of peoples what Grotius did for their international relationships. He founded both a science and an ideal. For he made finally impossible

any economic system which makes the volume of trade the test of national well-being; and he put in the forefront of social discussion the ultimate question of the condition of the people. And he performed the incalculable service to his generation of bringing to it a message of hope in an epoch where men seemed to themselves to have become the hapless victims of a misery from which there was no release. In every country of the world where men have set themselves to the task of social improvement, Marx has been always the source of inspiration and prophecy.

His weaknesses, of course, are obvious and important. "He diagnoses a disease admirably," says Mr. Wells, in an excellent phrase, "and then suggests rather an incantation than a remedy." Yet the diagnosis is an essential part of the cure. No one can read unmoved the picture he drew of the results of the Industrial Revolution. Massive in its outline, convincing in its detail, it was an indictment such as neither Carlyle nor Ruskin had power or strength to draw. It is relatively unimportant that his explanations of the phenomena he depicted have not stood the test of criticism. What is vital in the whole was his perception that a society dominated by business men and organized for the prosperity of business men had become intolerable. Hardly less splendid was his insistence that no social order is adequate in which the collective energies of men are not devoted to their common life. It does not matter that such perception had been given to others, that such insistence was not new. No thinker of the nineteenth century drove home the lesson with force so irresistible or with urgency so profound. Even his advocacy of catastrophic revolution has this much of truth in it, that a point is reached in the development of any social system where men will refuse to accept any longer a burden they find too great to bear; and, in that moment, if they cannot mitigate, they will become determined to destroy. The condition, in fact, upon which a state may hope to endure is its capacity for making freedom in each generation more widespread and more intense. Where Marx was wrong was in his belief that the catastrophe was, in itself, worthy of attainment and in his emphasis upon its ultimate benefit. But where he was,

also, irresistibly right was in his prophecy that the civilization of his epoch was built upon sand. And even the faults of his prophecy may be pardoned to an agitator in exile to whom the cause of the oppressed was dearer than his own welfare.

At bottom, the main passion by which he was moved was the passion for justice. He may have hated too strongly, he was jealous, and he was proud. But the mainspring of his life was the desire to take from the shoulders of the people the burden by which it was oppressed. He realized that what, in all varieties of time and place, has caused the downfall of a governing class, has never been some accidental or superficial event. The real cause of revolution is the unworthiness of those who controlled the destinies of a people. Indifference to suffering, selfishness, lack of moral elevation, it was for those defects that he indicted the class from which he sprang. He transformed the fears of the workers into hopes, he translated their effort from interest in political mechanisms to interest in social foundations. He did not trust in the working of laws, he sought always for the spirit that lay behind the order of which they were the expression. He was often wrong, he was rarely generous, he was always bitter; yet when the roll of those to whom the emancipation of the people is due comes to be called, few will have a more honourable, and none a more eminent place.

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THE  
SOCIALIST TRADITION  
IN THE  
FRENCH REVOLUTION

By

HAROLD J. LASKI

Professor of Political Science in the University of London

*London :*

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

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ONE SHILLING

TO MY FRIEND  
W. H. THOMPSON

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Published 1930

#### NOTE

This pamphlet was originally delivered as a lecture in the well-known series which my colleague, Professor F. J. C. Hearnshaw, organises annually at King's College, London. It is reprinted here by his kind permission. There is not, to my knowledge, any discussion of the subject in English; and it seemed to me that socialists might be interested in a period peculiarly important in the development of their creed.

The bibliography is no more than a handlist of the more important books on the subject. Had I sought to make any pretensions to completeness, the size of this pamphlet would have been at least double.

H. J. L.

March 8th, 1930.

# The Socialist Tradition in the French Revolution

## I

ALL Revolutions centre around the relation of political authority to the distribution of economic power; for, as Madison long ago insisted, the only durable source of faction is property. Anyone who examines the history of French social thought in the eighteenth century realises at once that its very essence is a changing conception of the place of property in the State. In a sense, indeed, the main work of the Revolution was simply the translation of that change from the realm of ideas into the realm of fact. From Fénélon to the outbreak of catastrophe there were few thinkers who were not impressed by two things: the indefensible character of privilege, upon the one hand, and the immense disparity between rich and poor, with its attendant and inherent dangers, upon the other. Not merely the systematic philosopher and the professional pamphleteer, but the novelist, the playwright, even the theologian, find it difficult to defend the actual distribution of economic satisfactions. They seek consistently for a remedy for this condition. They are widely aware that its continuance must inevitably mean the disruption of the State.

The consequence is the presence, throughout the eighteenth century, of an attitude to the rights of property which is profoundly critical in character. In a sense, it is even a socialist attitude, in that, not seldom, it is altogether sceptical of the régime in which individuals possess the means of production. But I hesitate to call it definitely socialist for three reasons. In the first place, it is a purely moral criticism; outside the Abbé Meslier, there is no writer of repute who seriously considered the means of redressing the balance of social good. It is, moreover, hardly aware of the relationship of an economic

system to the power of the State; even in Rousseau, this defect is noteworthy. It is, in the third place, diagnostic rather than reconstructive; Mably and Morelly, Diderot and Rousseau, Sebastien Mercier and Rétif de la Bretonne are all in an essential sense socialist; but, for all of them, the mechanism of transition to an egalitarian order is always by the conversion of men's hearts to better ways.

Rousseau and those I have named are, properly speaking, merely the extreme wing of a wider attack upon the notion that property can be a legal or moral right independently of the social consequences it involves. Attack upon the contemporary social order proceeded from the most various angles. Some of it came from a bitter revival of the sixteenth-century discussion of usury. Some of it was the outcome of that curious controversy over luxury of which Mandeville's too-famous *Fable of the Bees* is, through Voltaire's *Mondain*, the real parent. Not a little can be traced to that grim defence of Conservatism by Linguet, in which he anticipated so many of the theses of Karl Marx for almost antithetic ends. Part of it can be traced to the makers of imaginary Utopias where private property is unknown, or, related to this, to the reports of travellers of places like America, in which a Utopia of fact has come to birth. The creation, moreover, with Quesnay and the Physiocrats, of an economic philosophy upon something like scientific foundations was important. Administrative chaos, economic confusion, religious bankruptcy, all contributed their lesson to the torrent of criticism. When the States-General was summoned, the mind of France had been widely prepared for large economic innovation.

## II

I understand by socialism the deliberate intervention of the State in the process of production and distribution in order to secure an access to their benefits upon a consistently wider scale. From this angle, it is clear that no theories are entitled to be regarded as socialist which are not distinguished by at least two features. They must admit the right, and duty, of the State to subordinate

individual claim to social need, not as an occasional incident of its operation but as a permanent characteristic of its nature ; and they must, in the second place, seek the deliberate and continuous reconstruction of social institutions to the end of satisfying social demand upon the largest possible scale. It is in terms of these definitions that I propose to approach the difficult and complex years from 1789 until the failure of Babeuf, in 1796. I shall consider, first, how far a genuine socialism is discoverable in the cahiers and pamphlets which accompanied the summons of the States-General. Then I shall analyse the period until the advent of the Directory to see what of socialism there is in both the literature and the legislation of the time. I shall seek, above all, to show that the effort of Babeuf and his fellow-conspirators was the one genuine socialist movement in this epoch with a definite programme and an equally definite method of moving towards its realisation. Finally, I shall seek to estimate what of significance there was in the socialist experience of this epoch and how far it has given any specific character to the socialist movement of a later time.

Let me begin with a simple affirmation. Neither in the cahiers nor in the pamphlets which resulted from the summons of the States-General is there any important or general socialist doctrine. That does not mean that it was non-existent ; for, as Chassin has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> what we are dealing with here are the wants, at the most, of six million Frenchmen, and the needs of at least as many may have gone unexpressed. But when this type of literature is examined neither the grievance expressed nor the claims put forward are socialistic in any serious sense. There is bitterness, indignation, protest ; but if these are the inevitable accompaniment of socialism, they are not of its inner substance. Taken as a whole, what do the cahiers demand ? Fiscal reform, especially in the matter of equal taxation, judicial reform, administrative reorganisation. There is profound hostility to feudal rights. There is some criticism, not seldom urgent, of ecclesiastical property. There are occasional attacks on the greed of rich landowners. There is protest against the erosion, by aristocratic usurpation, of communal pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Génie de la Révolution* (1862), i. 334.

perty. There is some demand for taxation in terms of ability to pay, a tendency to desire limitation of testamentary disposition. A careful search will discover scattered demands for the restriction of inheritance, occasional schemes for public granaries, the fixation of prices, the limitation of usury. No one, I think, can honestly go through the cahiers upon any considerable scale without the impression that they represent not a theory of social reconstruction but the keen expression of practical experience. They are what the solid merchant, the comfortable peasant, the thinking and social-minded curé, would naturally set down as the lessons of the ancient régime.

Nor is this all. Throughout the cahiers there is a universal sense of the respect that is due to private property. The main complaint, indeed, against the past age is that the capriciousness of its system prevented the wholesale expression of that respect. "The object of the laws," said the Third Estate of Paris, "is to secure liberty and property." That note is omnipresent. Men seem unable sufficiently to emphasise the fact that property is sacred and inviolable, that no one can be deprived of property save for public purposes and with adequate compensation. District after district emphasises the right of all property to respect, save where its possession entails abuse; and, to my own knowledge invariably, abuse only means the justly hated privileges of feudalism. There is no objection that I can discover to unequal property. There is dislike of luxury, a demand for special treatment of the needy and the orphan, a sense that the proletariat should be lightly taxed or even free from all imposts. One discovers suspicion of the financier, a claim that the poor man should be able as surely to live by his labour as the rich to be secure in his property. There is the well-known plea from Paris for the creation of public workshops. There are various suggestions for the more humane treatment of the poor and the mendicant, and the improvement of hospitals. No one can look at demands like these and call them specifically socialist unless socialism is a mere synonym for humanitarianism. For the most part, they are the obvious dictates of common sense; and they are far less radical in temper than much of the social criticism of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*.

Those who drew up the cahiers of 1789 were entitled, like Clive, to be astounded at their own moderation.

The pamphlets of 1789 cannot, I think, be put upon quite the same footing as the cahiers; they announce certain principles which it is difficult not to describe as socialistic. But before I summarise some of their ideas I would venture upon a word of caution. It is necessary, I suggest, to distinguish between declamatory denunciation and definite plan. It is easy to find the first; it is difficult to find the second. We are no more entitled to call denunciations of inequality and misery socialistic than we can justifiably term Southey and Carlyle and Ruskin socialists because they were indignant with the horrors of factory civilisation. There are innumerable pamphlets which insist that the right to property is a social creation, which society can abolish as it pleases; there are literally hundreds which establish the principle of the right to work as inherent in the structure of the State. But most of the first group insist equally on the immense danger of disturbing established expectation; and few, if any, of the second group leave the right as more than an empty declaration to which no concrete scheme is annexed. Even Marat, in his *Project of a Declaration of the Rights of Man*, while he begins by insisting that the law must prevent excessive inequality of fortunes, and that a wise redistribution of wealth is necessary, ends by saying that the best thing that could have happened to France would have been for Montesquieu or Rousseau to have drawn up its constitution. But no one would have expected either to construct a socialist state.

We must, then, distinguish between declamation and positive plan. Of the first there is abundance and to spare. There is passionate denunciation of those rich who "eat in a single meal what would suffice for ten families in a year"<sup>1</sup>; there is the warning that unless the people is fed and the right to work assured, insurrection is certain and justified. There is the bitter plea of men like Devérité that the worker is like an army mule who breaks beneath his burden; but the only remedy of which he can think is the suppression of machinery as the root cause of low wages. One writer, Dufourmy de Villiers, points out with acuteness that the real poor are not represented in the

<sup>1</sup> *La Colère du Père Duchêne*.

States-General, and argues that they are entitled to compensation for the property they lack ; but his cure for the evil he vividly depicts is merely " a new moral foundation for a better-organised society." Another writer, after a piteous description of the sufferings of the workers, is satisfied to urge that public workshops are the logical consequence of the right to work ; yet he tells us nothing of how they are to be organised or what they are to produce.

We are nearer to socialistic ideas with Gosselin,<sup>1</sup> whose views are very akin to the agrarian socialists of the Cromwellian Revolution. After a trenchant exposure of the injustice of the existing social order, and an emphatic note that conditions would justify such a socialisation of land as existed in Sparta, he agrees that the remedy would be worse than the disease. But he urges the desirability of four measures in order to obtain equality. Uncultivated land should be given to the poor, as the Romans formerly settled soldiers on the soil. The clerical demesne should similarly be used, the recipients paying a small rent to the State and its former possessors ; and each year the government is to set aside a sum for buying up the estates of large landowners and distributing them in the same way. Finally, he suggests a progressive capital tax on private fortunes to extinguish the public debt. In a brief time, he thinks, these measures will establish a " happy equality," if the land so divided is declared indivisible and inalienable. The worst features of luxury will disappear ; and the engagement of a vast majority of citizens in agricultural pursuits will make commercial fortunes of insignificant importance. Sufficiency will mean an instructed people. Population will increase ; and emigrants will take this new model to happier climes. Gosselin has no doubt of the practicability of his scheme, and he offers it to the king with a simple faith of which no one can deny the charm.

Two other schemes of socialistic tendency deserve a word. Seven years before the Revolution Rétif de la Bretonne, in his *Andrographe*, had published a complete Utopia upon a rigorously communist foundation. But, like Plato with the *Republic*, he had realised that it was meat too strong

<sup>1</sup> *Réflexions d'un Citoyen* (1787) ; on Gosselin, see A. Lichtenberger, *Le Socialisme Utopique* (1898), p. 132.

for human digestion; only complete agreement could achieve it, and for this it was hopeless to look. In 1789, therefore, he published a revised version of his plan in the *Thesmographie*, which might, he thought, be capable of realisation. While private property is to remain, its possession is to be limited and difficult. Prices are to be controlled by local authorities and failure to cultivate as government prescribes is to result in forfeiture. At the back of the whole scheme is the principle that private property is a mere legal convention made by the State, and subject at any moment to its power of eminent domain.

Rétif's ideas, clearly, have no more than a paper value, for he had no vision at all of how to bring them into being. If Babeuf's Utopia is not less visionary, it is more important, because it shows how constant was his devotion to the principle of equality. The son of a former tutor of Joseph II, after a grim and starved childhood he became an agent to a nobleman, and acquired there that practical acquaintance with feudal privileges which played so large a part in the shaping of his life. In 1787 he began to correspond with the secretary of a provincial academy to whom he put questions which make evident his pre-occupation with equality as the key to social good. It is to inequality that he traces the pride of the rich and the excessive humility of the poor; and he urges upon his friend that it is the cause of all the evils of our social condition. The correspondence reveals him as a man profoundly influenced by Rousseau, passionate, and bitterly antagonised by the inequalities of the *ancien régime*.

In 1789, in conjunction with the mathematician Audiffred, he submitted his views to the National Assembly in something like coherent form. The *Cadaastre Perpétuel* does not yet envisage the need for revolution, but something at least of the spirit which, seven years later, was to take him to the scaffold is already there. No man, he says, who has sufficiency can be regarded as other than an exploiter if he seeks to obtain more than this. Men are by nature and right equal, and it is the business of the law to keep them so. Yet, as the law works, the very opposite is the case. The rich are the masters of society. The poor grow in numbers and their wages continually

decrease. This is an impossible position. The land, "the common mother of us all," must be divided equally so that each citizen has an assured patrimony which he cannot lose. Instruction must become general lest the wise oppress the ignorant. Unless this is done, the rich will cut the throats of the poor; and the latter are entitled to property, as a ward may, when he attains his majority, recover his rights from a defaulting trustee. But the first step on the road to reform is education. Equality in knowledge is the keystone of the arch of social reconstruction.

Babeuf's plans, doubtless, did not reach more than a handful; the Assembly was occupied with more immediate questions. What I wish only to emphasise again is the presence of a socialist ideal among the pamphlets of 1789, while noting that it is extraordinarily rare. Where there is an attack on the existing order, that is not socialism. It is nothing more than the final deposit of that sense of waste and injustice common, for instance, to all reformers of the age of Louis XIV. There is a good deal of Utopia-making, not a little violent paradox. But what there is of revolutionary destructiveness comes from sources which, as with Mably or Rousseau or Montesquieu, we cannot call genuinely socialist in the sense in which I have defined that term. Men feel vaguely that a new age has come, big with possibilities. There is a spirit of optimism abroad. But reform, and not revolution, is the essential tenor of men's minds in the first hours of the new dawn. What socialism there is is small in volume and insignificant in expression. It needed the realisation that civil equality and the reform of politics did not mean an end of suffering before a widespread change was possible.

### III

By the early months of 1790 the ultimate character of the Revolution had been fixed. Feudal privileges had been abolished; the monarchy had been put in fetters; the church had been overthrown. The Declaration of Rights contemplated a middle-class liberal State. If it was an exaggeration to say with Loustalot, that "everything tends to substitute an aristocracy of wealth for an

aristocracy of birth," the proletariat had not seriously benefited by the changes made. Phrases had been used in the Assembly, even by men so conservative as Mirabeau and Malouet, which implied a belief in equality, but the social legislation of the next few years showed clearly that they meant nothing. Already property was afraid; and the warnings of Edmund Burke had fallen upon ready ears. By 1790 the main preoccupation of the leaders was to stabilise and make effective the results of the first enthusiasm of the Revolution, while assuaging the sufferings of the common people. Few were able to see the effect of foreign war upon social policy, or to guess, as Burke so marvellously foresaw, that a successful general would emerge as the dictator of the State.

Anyone who analyses the literature and the legislation from 1790 until the fall of Robespierre has, above all, to be careful not to discover too much in what he reads. He must remember that he is dealing with a peasantry which was hungry for the indisputable possession of the land, and angrily suspicious of its former masters; where, therefore, he sees peasant riots he must not assume that they are grounded in socialist principle. He must remember, too, that in these years bad harvests were general, and unemployment widespread. The problem of feeding the towns and finding work for the proletariat was a difficult one, intensified by the timidity of the rich and their anxiety to put a term to experiment in social policy. Every revolutionary leader treads the edge of an abyss; and in the effort to satisfy a hungry and indignant constituency he uses phrases and threatens measures which are meant as denunciation rather than argument. The period, therefore, is full of declamation which has a socialist character. Rights are asserted, pledges are made, which suggest much more than they in fact mean. The political figures of the time cannot, in my judgment, be called in any case socialist; nor were they dealing with a public which, in any serious degree, expected socialist measures. What rather we are confronted with is a people full of misery to whom attacks upon the wealthy as the source of their misfortune might be expected to appeal. The Girondins, certainly, had no sort of sympathy with socialism; Danton, as I think, had no sort of social principles at all, and Brissot, differently from his earlier

views, was the defender of the small proprietor rather than anything else. There is socialism among the Jacobins, as there is also among the *enragés* ; but I regard it less as a body of consistent and systematic principle than as a series of extraordinary ideas meant to cope with an extraordinary situation. It is not until the Conspiracy of Babeuf that we meet with socialism in a serious and effective form. In a word, until Babeuf there are socialist ideas, but there is no socialism.

So to regard the character of this period is, I know, to run counter to a famous thesis of Taine. But I think his view is built upon a complete misunderstanding of the evidence. Undoubtedly there were attacks on property, hatred of the rich, revolutionary risings, a good deal of pillage and confiscation. But these are the inevitable accompaniments of any revolution where there is a hungry mob, a bewildered government, foreign and civil war. Socialism, as I have said, is a theory of social reconstruction and a methodology ; it is not an angry crowd attacking a speculator or burning the documents of its ancient servitude. It is not even a Jacobin deputy preaching the argarian law, or Marat insisting that, in time of crisis, each commune can take measures without limit to help its poor ; nor is it Robespierre arguing that excess of property is only justifiable where there is general sufficiency. Broadly speaking, the temper we confront is one which insists that, in a period of scarcity, the rich man who does not put his surplus at the disposal of the community is an enemy of society. It is a hatred of greed, of speculation, a suspicion that great wealth implies counter-revolutionary sentiment, that we meet almost everywhere. But this attitude cannot be described as socialism any more than its Russian analogue means an acceptance of the principles of Lenin.

The true approach lies, I believe, along quite different lines. The Revolution inherited from the *philosophes* a rigorous criticism of property as an absolute right, an ethical defence of communism, and a profound sense that, because the privileges of aristocracy are indefensible, the state might be made to serve the people creatively. These notions had to be applied in a time of crisis, without time to think either of their philosophic significance or their administrative possibility. They had to be applied

when there was civil war at the centre of national life, and foreign war at its circumference. Measures which are suitable to an extremity are rarely the expression of a considered philosophy. They represent merely the response to immediate exigency, and their very authors are, often enough, the first to deny that they have permanent significance. Certainly there could not have been any widespread socialism in a revolution which began in enthusiastic loyalty to Louis XVI and ended in a loyalty at least superficially enthusiastic to Napoleon. Girondins who anathematised the agrarian law, Jacobins who hissed the leading *enragés* out of the Paris clubs, do not sound like the apostles of socialist principle. Effectively, I should argue, there would have been no socialism at all if the economic condition had not been acute. What men were prepared for was the abrogation of what was restrictive in the *ancien régime*. Crisis drove many to heroic words and measures which they felt to be suited to an heroic time ; but when the situation, after the death of Robespierre, became administratively manageable, what emerges as stable is the bourgeois liberalism which drove Babeuf to revolt. And the very memory of how property had been in danger was so driven into men's minds that, after 1796, it was in process of becoming the very absolute against which the eighteenth century had made its magistral protest.

This, at least, is how I read the evidence. It does not exclude the fact that there were socialist ideas ; it does deny that there were either many to put them forward or a wide public conscious of their meaning and anxious for their application. It is worth while to consider the expression of those ideas in some little detail, and to note their affiliations with orthodox Jacobinism on the one hand, and the Conspiracy of 1796 upon the other. I begin by noting one general point : all parties in the State agreed upon the undesirability of excessive differences of fortune. Mirabeau, Malouet, Vergniaud, Brissot, Condorcet all spoke in this sense ; and there was a fairly widespread tendency to approve the simple life and a progressive income-tax. These are, of course, views which the eloquence of Rousseau had made almost platitudes. They were things which everyone had to say who did not wish to be regarded as reactionary. The first person worth

mention who went at all far in a socialist direction was the Abbé Fauchet, who founded in 1790 a discussion circle, and was himself, later, a Girondin deputy. His views undoubtedly influenced a wide circle, though the fact that, as Camille Desmoulins tells us, he could be hissed in his own section for support of the agrarian law, shows that men were rather interested in, than moved to accept, his ideas.

His views are obviously founded upon Rousseau. His journal—the *Bouche de Fer*—preaches the original goodness of man, and his right to an equal share of the earth. When he enters the State he surrenders all his rights which are then possessed by government for the general welfare. By this is meant that all men have something, and no man has too much. What must be prevented is extreme poverty and wealth and, above all, social parasitism. He recommends the establishment of national factories, the limitation of land-holding, a rigorous control of inheritance, and such a regulation of the marriage-laws as would prevent the union of large family fortunes. It is noteworthy that even these moderate views were bitterly attacked, not only by conservatives like Mallet du Pan, but also by radicals like Desmoulins. Fauchet himself continually softened whatever of rigour they may possess; and he put them forward rather as an ultimate, than as an immediate, programme. He was less a doctrinal socialist than a Christian mystic imbued with the importance of equality by his desire for a change in the heart of mankind.

Among the Girondins, I think, there was no one who was socialist in any real sense of the term. Brissot was an exponent of Jeffersonian democracy, Condorcet was a radical much of the school of Thomas Paine, Sebastien Mercier shares the horror which, as he tells us, Rousseau would have felt at the ideas of Babeuf; and Rétif abandoned his *Thesmographie*, being content, amid wild denunciation of Jacobins and sansculottes, to insist that equality in land or in incomes below fifty thousand francs is both impossible and criminal. The only important Girondin who shows signs of more radical views is the one-time pastor Rabaut Saint-Etienne; though he may be said less to embrace socialism than to fringe its boundaries. Equality, he tells us, is the soul of a republic; unequal

wealth divides classes and ruins equality in politics. But it cannot be established by force, and the best we can hope for is to reduce inequality by law. How this is to be done he does not tell us in detail. A maximum fortune can be fixed, the State taking the remainder, whether by gift or force, for foundations of public utility or unforeseen State expenditure. National workshops should be created, and inheritance and testamentary disposition should be controlled. But, even more, Rabaut Saint-Etienne would desire the State to encourage those moral habits in the people which are favourable to the atmosphere of equality.

These can hardly be called extreme views; though it is worth pointing out that they, and their like, excited the wildest alarm among conservative thinkers. Equality and an agrarian law seemed to a charitable worker named Lambert "a violation of all the laws of nature." Men like La Harpe exhausted themselves in expressions of horror at the extreme and dangerous attacks upon the foundations of social order. Their very demand to have done with experiment naturally provoked the antithesis of their caution. To have accepted their attitude would have meant simple futility before the grave economic problems—how grave M. Mathieu has recently shown<sup>1</sup>—which confronted the State. The conservatism of the Right did not appeal to the Girondins. But the latter, to whom disorder was hateful, and whose fear of the proletariat was omnipresent, shrank from a policy which seemed to jeopardise the property of the middle classes. They were naturally overthrown by the Jacobins, whose policy of centralisation and experiment provided the only hope the masses could see for assuaging their misfortunes. Brissot might join hands with Mallet du Pan and Barruel to accuse them of subverting the foundations of social order; to themselves, and, in general, I think, quite honestly, they merely appeared as men prepared to utilise the authority of the State for the preservation of the Revolution.

I do not mean to imply that there was not a definitely socialist background to Jacobin policy. Certainly there was; though, to understand it, we must remember that its sources are complex. Partly, it was born of immediate necessity, partly of the fact that their leaders, Marat and

<sup>1</sup> *Robespierre et la Vie Chère* (Paris, 1927).

Robespierre in particular, were deeply read in those earlier thinkers, especially Rousseau and Mably, who had insisted that the right to property is a social concept made by, and limited by, the will of the State. They never had a new theory of a different social order. For the most part, they were the *petite bourgeoisie* to whom Montesquieu and Rousseau were a gospel to which they were prepared to sacrifice much. And the sacrifices they were prepared to make were such as the poorer classes welcomed, especially when these saw in hostility to the Jacobins the privileged of the old régime and the rich men of the new. What they said and did no more made them deliberately and consciously socialist than did the programme unfolded by Mr. Lloyd George in 1909 make him a member of the Socialist Party. They would attack the rich, but they would not have the agrarian law. They would demand sacrifices—Mr. Chamberlain's doctrine of "ransom"—but they would do nothing to injure the idea of individual property itself. Danton, for example, was merely a democrat who wished that the rich should bear their full share of the common burden, and that men should be recognised to have an equal right to happiness. Marat, as I have noted, was a moderate liberal in 1789. Experience made him more violent in declamation. But no journalist who merely thinks from one day to the next, especially if he is gambling for his head, has a considered philosophy. If he regarded economic equality as desirable, it was for some distant future he need not discuss. What he was above all concerned to maintain was the sovereign right of the State to take whatever measures it might think fit to prevent disaster. Reasonable wages, prices within the reach of the poor, local control of food supply—these were the things he emphasised day by day in the *Ami du Peuple*. But no one can read his articles without seeing that he is merely inventing remedies for a crisis. He has no thought of permanent principles.

With Robespierre it is different; from his writings and speeches one can, I think, piece together a coherent doctrine which has clearly socialist affinities. Property for him is simply a social institution; it is the citizen's right to enjoy as he will the goods guaranteed to him by the State. The latter can, therefore, limit its rights, punish speculators, and control inheritance. But absolute

equality is a chimera impossible of realisation in civil society. To preach it is to invite a detestable anarchy. There is an excessive inequality which the State should control. It leads to the domination of the community by a few wealthy men, and their vices contaminate society. The State owes to the poor, the source of moderation and civic virtue, the right to work or maintenance ; to procure this for them is a more sacred task than to protect the wealth of the rich. Fixation of prices in their interest is essential, and no punishment is too strong for speculators in food. A severe and progressive income-tax is justified ; in an ideal State no one would have more than an income of three thousand livres. All this, clearly enough, is the mind of a man nourished on Rousseau and Mably, the partisan of a simple and equal society, the enemy of the rich whom he feels to stand in the way of its achievement. He speaks the language of bitterness and hate ; for, to him, the rich are the enemies of the republic. But if Robespierre's ideal is anything, it is that of the small town radical rather than the socialist. It is the excess of wealth, not property itself, to which he takes objection.

Much the same might be said of Saint-Just, whose *Institutions Republicaines* shows us pretty fully the direction of his mind. A nation of small farmers, general equality, a compulsion upon all to work, a rigorous control of inheritance to the direct line, a national system of education, and the endowment of young married couples, are the chief proposals he makes. The Saint-Just of the Convention is less Utopian and more bitter ; but loathing of the rich apart, there is nothing positively extreme in what he has to say. And this is, in general, the temper of his colleagues. The right of the poor to property, the danger of excessive wealth, the duty of the State to confiscate that excess for the general benefit, these are the themes of a thousand speeches. Violent class-war is, of course, widely preached, especially by some of the representatives on mission. Lecomte Saint-Michel's phrase that the rich are " the mortal enemies of the Republic " is typical of innumerable others. Billaud-Varenne calls them " the bane of ordered states " ; but it is significant that he should add that property is " unfortunately the necessary foundation of civil society." But when, with them, or such journalists and pamphleteers

as Prudhomme, Harmand, Desgrouas, we have exhausted the terminology of vituperation, we come back inevitably to a positive theory on the lines of Robespierre's doctrine. When Boissy d'Anglas, in his exposition of the Constitution of the Year III, said that "un pays gouverné par les propriétaires est dans l'ordre social," he was not far from the Jacobin ideal; the owner must not be rich and all must be owners. That is the distinguishing feature of Jacobin theory.

I would emphasise again the fact that all this is not socialistic innovation, but the inheritance of the criticism of property made by the eighteenth century. Political equality, it had taught, is nothing without economic equality; men like Turgot, Siéyès, and Condorcet had said so incessantly. "Equality in fact," said Condorcet, "is the final aim of social technique, since inequality in riches, inequality of condition, and inequality of education, are the main cause of all evils." And alongside this notion was the full realisation that a State composed of the two nations of rich and poor is bound to conflict. "There has never been, nor will there be," says a pamphlet of 1789, "any but two really distinct classes of citizens, the owners of property and those who have none; the first have everything, the second nothing." Jacobinism is simply these ideas applied to a critical period in which danger sharpened the antagonism between classes, and made the idea of equality and simplicity seem a definite measure of public safety. It was neither a theory nor a method of thorough-going social transformation. Rather was it a demand that the surplus of the rich be deliberately used by the State for the mitigation of popular suffering.

#### IV

Before I turn to Babeuf and his conspiracy, it is worth while to spend a little time on one or two of his precursors. It is probable that ideas which may vaguely be termed communist began as early as 1789; for we are told by Baudot that the "acrimony and bitterness" of the Girondins was due to "fear of seeing the ideas of the Communists predominate." The sense continually grew that any society in which men, as Billaud-Varenne said,

"existed upon a direct but not mutual dependence upon some other human being," was in fact in a condition of slavery. In 1793 and 1794 there were among the sections, and notably in the Club des Cordeliers, men to whom Jacobin doctrine seemed needlessly conservative. We get hints of secret societies, suggestions of plans like the credit schemes of Proudhon, demands that the profits of banking revert to the State. In men like Jacques Roux, Varlet, Dolivier, Boissel, Lange, there is a clear stream of doctrine looking towards a communist solution of social problems.

Thermidor destroyed whatever hopes and prospects these men may have cherished; after it there came signs of what a police-spy, one hopes ironically, called "a profound and universal peace." But these men had their dreams, and it is worth while to note their substance. For they show how, even in the gravest moments of the Revolution, the incurable optimism of men was still prepared to make all things new. They had no clear idea of how their views could be realised; and I think it probable that they had no sort of sympathy with the methods Babeuf was later to propose. They saw all the fallacies of *laissez-faire*, and their desire was to realise that equality of fact of which I have spoken. We know, alas, too little of most of them; one would give much, for instance, for a detailed biography of Rose Lacombe, who must be very nearly the first woman Communist. But what we do know suggests simple-minded and honest men, honoured by the masses for the high character of their ideals.

Among them, perhaps, Jacques Roux is worthy of particular mention. He had been a priest, and was, perhaps, one of those who had been freed by the Revolution from that burning indignation which still lives for us in the bitter pages of the Abbé Meslier. He was always poor, and we have a picture of a lonely figure, whose sole companion was a dog, preaching a simple communism in the working-class quarters of Paris. There is Chaliier, of Lyons, a mystic, whom Michelet has noted as an extraordinary man, and Lange, in some sort the precursor of Fourier. Important, too, is Varlet, a Parisian workman, about whom our ignorance is complete, and the curé of Mauchamp, Pierre Dolivier, whose book was published

for him by his fellow-citizens of the commune of Anvers. All of them are typical of an outlook not without wide support in those days of agony. They desire the limitation of land-holding, forced loans to feed the people, the confiscation of all property due to speculation, national workshops, and the public control of the food-supply. They differ from the Jacobins in that they do not pay regard to the rights of property. They consider the urgency of the position too great for measures of conciliation to be desirable. They see quite definitely in the rich and the comfortable the deliberate enemies of the poor, who will not hesitate to take advantage of public misery for private profit. They are mostly, again differently from the Jacobins, in favour of the agrarian law, though with definite leanings to a national control of its operation. Thermidor left them exasperated, largely because they saw, in the disappearance of Robespierre, the failure of their hope for drastic economic legislation. But they could not go so far as Babeuf, because they definitely respected a democratic system. "Dictatorship," said Roux, "is the annihilation of liberty"; and there is in most of them, especially in Dolivier, a marked trend towards anarchism.

Their ideas, on the whole, are seen most clearly in the pamphlet, published in 1789, by Boissel, a Jacobin of the extreme left who was active throughout the Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Bitterly attacked in the Assembly, it seems to have exercised some influence, especially after 1793, and it is certainly an interesting link between ideas like those of Mably before 1789, and of Babeuf afterwards. It begins with a passionate attack on organised society as the nurse of all evil. It examines, and rejects, property, marriage and religion as the expressions of the worst impulses of men. Property is simply an instrument of oppression, and the root of a discord which the invention of money merely increases. The business of society is to respond to our true instincts, which are naturally good. This can be done if we recognise that God is the only true owner, and that we have the right to nothing save in terms of need. We must reform education, nationalise industry, and train men in the spirit of a collective ownership with a view to the introduction of complete commun-

<sup>1</sup> *Le Catéchisme du Gère Humaine.*

ism. Here, clearly, his trust is in an educational system which will one day make men ready for the new order. By 1793 he was insisting to the Jacobins that the fruits of the earth belong to the poor by natural right and may be taken by force, for property is an usurpation of the inalienable right of man to subsistence. But beyond that vague sense of the duty to use the law, Boissel, like his fellows, has no clear notion of how the change he desires may be definitely effected. With him, as with Dolivier,<sup>1</sup> a society can be reconstructed on the principles of a communism somewhat like that of the Russian *mir* and the right of each man to the whole product of his labour. And much of their outlook is determined by the clear perception that the real result of the Revolution has been to establish the farmer and the merchant in the seat of power. They realise that the aristocrat has been dethroned in the interest of the middle classes. They insist that anything short of communism must mean of necessity the retention of a class-structure in society.

But they do not really know how communism is to be attained. I agree with Kropotkin that an analysis of this early philosophy anticipates much of the principles of 1848, that little of what was elaborated by Fourier and Owen and Proudhon cannot be found in pamphlets and speeches and local decrees of the period. They had an ideal but not a method. The importance of Babeuf and his colleagues lies in the fact that not only did they envisage this ideal with some particularity, but they had quite definite notions of how to seize power for its attainment. It is probable enough that few of the two or three thousand people who seem definitely to have been influenced by the conspiracy knew or shared in their views with any precision; they may have known the battle-cries without thinking through the programme. That is not, I think, particularly important. All revolutions are the act of a minority; they depend for their success on sympathy for their general end rather than for their bill of particulars. Babeuf and his fellows knew how they proposed to proceed; and the strategy they invented has provided ever since the methodology of revolutionary socialism at least in its large outline.

I have already noted that Babeuf was a communist

<sup>1</sup> *Essai sur la justice Primitive.*

from the outset of the Revolution. I need not here detail his later career. Though his *Système de Dépopulation* shows that, at one time, he was both anti-terrorist and anti-egalitarian, he was one of those who saw in the fall of Robespierre the end of what was beneficent in the Revolution. Always in want, often in prison, rash, enthusiastic, self-confident, single-minded, he was just the man to lead a desperate attempt upon the conquest of power. The Conspiracy seems to have been formed during one of his terms in prison. A few fellow-prisoners were initiated into his ideas; the group grew steadily, and became the Society of the Pantheon, which the government did not fail to watch and proclaim. It had two wings: at the very centre were the real communists, and, closely affiliated, but remote from the heart of the affair, a number of ancient Jacobins to whom the abrogation of Robespierre's constitution was a bitter memory. The scheme was linked together by a secret committee of direction, to which its publications were almost certainly due. Among them were some extraordinary men, Darthe, Sylvain Maréchal, Germain, and Buonarroti, who was to survive them all and to be their historian. They had contacts with some former members of the Convention, with the army and the police, even with the underworld. I need not add that from their early days they were honey-combed with spies, one of whom was, unknown to them, introduced by Buonarroti and Darthe to the very heart of the affair. They never had any real chance of success. Their plans were known, almost from their inception, to the Directory; it needed less honest and zealous men than they to elude the cold-blooded machinations of Barras. Everyone, moreover, was tired of bloodshed and misery; the police reports and the diplomatic correspondence show clearly that the revolutionary spirit was exhausted. The leaders were arrested and tried by a special tribunal. Babeuf and Darthe, after a vain attempt at suicide, were executed; other important conspirators, including Buonarroti, were imprisoned or deported. Those who lived on became the depositaries of a tradition which, after 1830, they found the new generation eager to cherish.

I shall discuss, first, the programme of Babeuf, and then his strategy. Neither is a very easy thing to do, partly because some of the evidence, being produced by spies at the

trial, is suspect, and partly because not a little of what we have is clearly not in its final redaction. Yet the literature, checked by the narrative of Buonarroti, and, even more, by the valuable discoveries of Advielle, enables us to see pretty clearly what was involved. And this can, I think, be put in a single sentence. There is no real innovation in doctrine, which is the eighteenth-century tradition, clarified and made precise by the profound experience of seven revolutionary years; there is a definite innovation in method, which opens an epoch of decisive importance in the history of socialism.

Let us start with two significant sentences used by Babeuf in his trial. "My companions and I," he told his judges, "have groaned over the unhappy results of the Revolution . . . it has merely replaced a band of ancient scoundrels by a band of new ones." For the object of society is the realisation of the common happiness. That is impossible without the rule of equality, which is the clear implication of natural law. This does not mean the agrarian law, which is not equality at all. All men have a permanent right to a continuous share in the social product. To recognise private property and differences of fortune is to admit theft to the heart of society. Inheritance is unjust, respect for the superiority of talent is dangerous. All work has the same value, and all capacity should be equally rewarded. Communism is the only way by which this can be realised. It means the common ownership of land. It means the socialisation of industry and universal and compulsory labour. Education, too, should be equal and common. The theory differs from what has gone before in that earlier thinkers demanded relative equality. The Babouvistes insist that this is more difficult to achieve and to maintain than equality in the full sense of the term. Any society in which less than this exists is built upon civil war and is bound to mean the exploitation of the poor, of that is, the mass of the community. There can be no justice unless the only recognised differences in the State are those of age and sex. To put the whole wealth of society at the disposition of the people is to assure the maximum of virtue, justice, and happiness. Envy and hate disappear. Each can recognise that his well-being is intimately related to that of his neighbour. To serve society in such an order is to serve oneself. The reign of equality

will be the last revolution necessary to the well-being of man.

This body of doctrine was developed in the most diverse and ingenious ways ; in the art of literary propaganda, the Babouvistes had certainly nothing to learn from their generation. Careful doctrinal analyses, as in the famous *Analyse de la doctrine de Babeuf*, a brilliant short programme, as in the *Manifeste des Egaux*, drawn up by Sylvain Maréchal, songs, poems, newspapers, special literature for the army and the police, placards, memoranda, slogans, invective, all the typical devices of modern publicity are there. It is easy to see how their eloquent denunciation of existing conditions would appeal to the unemployed, for they set out with simplicity the experience through which the working-classes had passed. It is even probable that their emphasis upon the failure of the Revolution, their attacks upon the rich, their hatred of the Directory, their impassioned defence of the honesty and greatness of Robespierre, commanded wide sympathy. The programme, clearly, as Babeuf himself would have recognised, is simply a careful restatement of Rousseau and Mably, of Diderot and Morelly. It is both bolder and more precise than its predecessors. It has none of their faith in the possibility of changing men's hearts in an individualist society. It is much more bitter against the rich, much more insistent that they are "brigands," for whose destruction all patriots must hope. The Babouvistes are more optimistic than their predecessors, in that they think the essential revolution is capable of immediate achievement. But in the general contour of their objective there is nothing essential to distinguish them from a half-score of thinkers in the pre-revolutionary epoch.

That is not, as I have said, the case with their strategy, where there is genuine and important novelty. This can best be analysed in two ways. On the one hand, there are the definite steps they took in the organisation of their conspiracy up to the time of their arrest ; on the other, there is the theory of what was to be its conduct after they had seized political power. At the head of the affairs was the small central committee, with Babeuf at its head. This was the brains of the whole conspiracy. It met in secret, practically every night, always alone, and not

seldom changing its headquarters to avoid any possible suspicion. It dealt with day-to-day business, the actual conditions under which the insurrection was to take place, the legislative measures to be taken on the morrow of the insurrection, and the future institutions of the new republic. It was responsible not only for the overt propaganda, but also for stimulating the activities of its local agents, to whom the personnel of the committee remained unknown. Its individual members had relations with the agents, but rather as themselves officers of liaison than as chiefs. The agents, most of whom were chosen with great care, were of the essence of the plan. Tried revolutionaries, they were the contact between the central committee and the masses. They reported on the feeling of the population, its grievances and aspirations. They supplied, therefore, that knowledge upon which the leaders could build successful propaganda and action. Linked with them were local committees in the districts of Paris, who made their impress upon the workers, put up placards and distributed leaflets, addressed meetings in the workmen's clubs, talked in cafés and factories, and spread as widely as possible the volume of discontent, the hope that one final effort might make all things new. Women, also, played their part, and it was hoped, particularly, to employ the services of the demi-monde to neutralise any hostility in the army.

To the latter special attention was paid. The leaders had carefully chosen military agents, to each of whom a definite task was allotted. General Fyon was in charge of the Invalides ; Germain took care of the police ; Massey controlled the detachments at Saint-Genes ; Vanneck was given the task of infecting the remaining troops in Paris. Agents were obtained in each barracks to work on the minds of the soldiers ; others, sometimes women, frequented their cafés. Sophie Lapierre, whose beauty was well known in Paris, declaimed the proclamations of the Central Committee and sang its songs. The evidence at the trial suggests that no mean success attended these efforts. They were paralleled by similar attention to the police. Information was also obtained about *agents provocateurs* from sympathisers in the force ; and in several cases the head of a police section was in close contact with the conspirators.

Through these means every sort of step was taken

which might injure the government and create the expectation of some great impending event. Every rumour likely to injure the Directory was widely spread. Complaints were broadcast, meetings held, sympathisers from the provinces brought to Paris to create the illusion of a national movement, assemblies of street-mobs were organised. The Laws of the 27 and 28 Germinal, by which the government took power to dissolve all political meetings, shows that the importance of the movement was realised. Insubordination among the troops, the punishment of which revealed unrest in the police, is further proof that the danger was real. But the fact that Barras actually negotiated, probably dishonestly, an attempt at an alliance with Germain of the secret committee, shows both that the Directory was alarmed, and that it was, probably throughout, cognisant of the plan. When the Committee, after discussions of military plans, was waiting for the critical moment, the Directory swooped upon them. It was estimated at that time that, the masses apart, the Insurrectionists could count upon 17,000 men, of whom 9,500 were regular troops. These were to march upon the arsenals and the seat of government, while others were to hold the streets of Paris and repulse all hostile attack. The plan was never put into action, as Barras was the first to strike his blow ; but it is, I think, evidence of the hold the conspirators had obtained that some seven hundred men should have marched to Grenelle and sought to excite the troops there to revolt and rescue their leaders. They were only dispersed by military attack and numerous arrests. After that, the conspiracy was at an end.

Clearly enough, as a piece of organisation, the plans of the Babouvistes were remarkably conceived. Not less interesting was their conception of the methods to be used in the event of success. Here their views were built upon the theory of class war. Society, for them, was divided into rich and poor, and neither had any interest in common with the other. The rich depended for their position upon their power to keep the poor in subordination ; the latter could conquer their rights only by the dethronement of the rich. In a society in which overt civil war was the main feature, it was unthinkable that power could be conquered by the poor, save by violent means, for the rich would

never abandon their privileges without fighting for them. This, they felt, was the real lesson of 1789 ; it was the lesson of 1793 ; it was the lesson implicit in the experience of Thermidor. It meant that when the political State had been captured, a period of rigorous dictatorship would be necessary as the prelude to communist democracy. Only in this way could the people be withdrawn from influences hostile to equality, and given that unity of will essential to the adoption of republican ideas. " It was evident," wrote Buonarroti thirty years later, " that the inherent necessity of things, even the success itself of our enterprise, meant an interval between the fall of aristocratic power, and the final establishment of popular democracy." An assembly was impossible since it left the success achieved to the hazard of a popular vote. The revolution had not been made merely to change the form of administration ; its object was to change the nature of society itself. This could not be left to the people who had been trained to habits which ignored the natural order of things. The revolutionary government must therefore act on behalf of the people. It must, as Buonarroti wrote, " snatch from the natural enemies of equality the means of deceit and fear and division." What was required was " an extraordinary and necessary authority which would restore its liberty to the nation, despite the corruption which was the consequence of its ancient slavery, and, despite the attacks of those enemies, within and without, sworn to its destruction." It is the doctrine of permanent revolution by dictatorship in the name of the proletariat.

To seize power is, therefore, only the first step ; it does not end the revolution. Parliamentarism and democracy are impossible because they risk the whole purpose of the insurrection ; the people is not yet fit to be entrusted with a power which counter-revolutionaries might seize from them again. " What was necessary," wrote Babeuf, " was men whose doctrines and manners, whose whole life was in full harmony with the spirit of the institutions which they were called to create." Liberty must be denied at the outset lest it be lost for ever. What was to be done was in accord with natural law. It was what the people would itself desire when it came to understand the egalitarian State. The Dictatorship was thus, in effect,

the general will of the proletariat. It lost its freedom only the more fully to find it.

The institutions and measures this Dictatorship would create are extraordinarily significant in the light of our recent experience. The central committee had at first considered the idea of appointing a single person as dictator; but this idea was rejected in favour of the government of the committee itself, advised by an assembly composed of one democrat chosen by each of the departments from a list of suitable persons submitted to them. This had, however, to be modified after discussion with their Jacobin allies; and the final form of assembly was to consist of some sixty former members of the Convention and a hundred other democrats nominated by the people from safe candidates. The Committee retained the right to initiate legislation, together with full executive powers. Beneath it, there was to be created commissars in each department, with great authority. Their business was to speed the successful revolution. They were to make propaganda for its ideas, create local societies for its completion, deal with counter-revolutionaries, and assist all active democrats in the provinces. Before appointment they were to declare their financial position, and a special tribunal was created to examine their accomplishment of their task. Further, to strengthen the new order, there was to be created a kind of revolutionary academy, a *seminaire normal*, "where citizens from each department would be sent, in a predetermined order, to learn the principles of the new revolution, and to be imbued with the spirit of the reformers." To complete the structure of the Dictatorship, the Babouvistes decided to recreate all local institutions, including the revolutionary commissions, as they existed before the fall of Robespierre in Thermidor.

I cannot even attempt here to analyse in detail the actual measures by which the central committee proposed to accomplish its task. But it is, I think, worth while briefly to indicate the principles upon which those measures were based. All healthy persons were to work, and no idle person was to possess political rights. The homeless and the poor were to be housed in the houses of all who had conspired, or might conspire, against the Revolution. The people was to be armed, and all "parasites" disarmed. The press was to be controlled to prevent the spread of false

news or attack. Special taxes were to be levied on all not sympathetic to the new régime with a right, at need, of complete confiscation. The old defenders of the Revolution and the unfortunate were to be given the use of new possessions. Anyone who had emigrated or rebelled was to lose his property ; and confiscation was also visited upon the negligent farmer, the public servant enriched by the exercise of his office, and any who were judicially condemned. The sale of national property was suspended ; and, inheritance being abolished, all private estates, on death, were to revert to the State. Machinery was to be developed, and uncultivated land brought into use ; to this end state-shops were to be opened in each commune, and an economic council, representing the different professions, was to aid the local authorities in the provision and organisation of work. Education, with the necessary vocational bias, was to be common to all, and so developed that the average man might hope to play his full part in the life of the State. Foreign trade was to be a state-monopoly, while money and wages were abolished for internal purposes. There was to be assistance for the old, and free medical service for the sick ; and the treatment of criminals was to be entirely reformed. Whatever its weakness as a practical scheme, it is obvious that Babeuf and his colleagues had arrived at a clear perception of the programme they wished to achieve.

## V

[The modern theory of social revolution is naturally the outcome of a profounder study of historic conditions than it was open to Babeuf and his colleagues to make. Yet anyone who compares their analysis with the *Communist Manifesto*, on the one hand, or the writings of Lenin and Trotsky upon the other, can hardly doubt the original source of their inspiration. The line of affiliation, indeed, is a direct one ; for Buonarroti was the master of that generation whose words and acts were the basis of Marxian strategy. The class-war, the failure of reform, the necessity of dictatorship, the insistence on a social revolution, the ultimate significance of the economic question, the realisation that insurrection is an art, the careful prepara-

tion of the measures it is to entail, the insistence on the proletariat as the sole revolutionary class, the perception of the importance of education and propaganda, the sense that intellectual theories are born of the methods of economic production, all these the Babouvistes clearly understood. All these, also, became part of the essential Socialist tradition of the nineteenth century. "It is nearly forty years since Babeuf died," wrote Charles Nodier, in 1836, "and his party is still living . . . he recognised truths which no government has deigned to accept, truths which can never die." Of the socialism of the Revolution, indeed, Babouvisme is the one element destined to permanent influence. Voyer d'Argenson, Teste, Raspail, Louis Blanc, Leroux and Blanqui in France, Belhasse and Potter in Belgium, Bronterre O'Brien in England, have all borne testimony to the part it played in their lives through contact with Buonarroti. Weitling's work in the canton de Vaud brought him into direct contact with it also; and it is worth remembering the part that the League of the Just played as an instrument of early Marxism. And it is worth remembering also that one of the Communards of 1870 was the grandson of that Clémence who had sat with Babeuf in the Central Committee. It was with reason that Count Albert de Mun should, in 1896, in the Chamber of Deputies, have accused the French socialists of being the descendants of Babeuf. That is, in fact, their real and effective origin.

We must not, indeed, exaggerate their insight into the technique the modern Marxian has developed. They had practically no conception of socialism as an international force; it needed the impact of the Industrial Revolution to emphasise the limits of nationalism in revolutionary strategy. There was not enough realisation of successful revolution as grounded in a set of objective economic conditions, and not merely born of determined organisation at a premature moment. There were many of those elements in the theory of Babeuf which, in 1847, Marx stigmatised as "Utopian socialism"—the belief in an ultimate natural law, the conception of an original endowment of human impulse which was definitely good and merely obscured by evil institutions, something, at least, of the acceptance of insurrection for its own sake, upon the dangers of which Lenin has written so brilliantly. The latter's phrase,

indeed, that "Babeuf was a Jacobin who leaned on the working-classes" has a real truth in it; for he never sufficiently perceived the danger of the alliances he was prepared to make for the end he had in view. Nor did he realise at all how much in advance of effective possibility was his programme. A social revolution cannot be successful on the falling tide of a political revolution. Babouvisme was doomed to failure before it got under weigh.

Yet, it must be emphasised, the depth of its insight is remarkable. Anyone who reads its voluminous literature with attention, and compares the habits it postulates with the operations of Bolshevism, cannot help being impressed by the resemblance. Elsewhere I have pointed out<sup>1</sup> that the strength of communism lies in its effort to effect a complete transvaluation of values in terms of a great ideal passionately cherished. I have pointed out the strength given by faith in that ideal to its adherents, their profound sense of its exclusive truth, their willingness to sacrifice themselves to its principles, their insistence that the end is so great that the means adopted to it are, whatever their cost, justified. The detailed resemblances between the programme of Babeuf and that of the Russian Communist are remarkable enough; but even more remarkable is the similarity of ultimate temper which runs through the two movements. There is the same exhilaration of spirit, the same bitterly-drawn distinction between friend and foe, the same urgency that all things be made new, the same power relentlessly to dissect the weaknesses of contemporary society, the same capacity for self-confident optimism, the same genius for propaganda and invective. Lenin, so to say, is the Babouvistes writ large; and the architect of the November Revolution was greatly indebted to men who, if they saw less clearly than he, envisaged a civilisation upon the same pattern he sought to build.

## VI

What results from this analysis? The French Revolution, in a narrow perspective, must, I think, be regarded as primarily individualist in character; the real expression of its effective outcome is the Civil Code, in no sense a

<sup>1</sup> *Communism* (1927), p. 138 f.

socialist document. Its real result was to transfer power from the aristocracy to the peasant and middle classes. The impress made upon them by the socialist tendencies of the period, especially by their extreme translation in the Conspiracy of Babeuf, was to make the idea of private property more sacred, and less susceptible to attack, than it was held to be at any time in the eighteenth century. If it attacked the property of the old régime, it consolidated that of the new upon a wider basis ; and the era of change and confiscation only made men more eager to suppress the possibility that titles could be called into question. We must not forget that the abolition of feudal rights and corporate privilege was made in the name of the individual ; that, where confiscation took place, it was done in the name of public safety and could thus be regarded as essentially a transitory measure. Most of the attacks upon the rights of property which did take place were rather the inevitable accompaniment of civil war than an expression of any wide desire for social transformation. Given political liberty, a constitutional state, and equality before the law, and most men were content to abstain from speculative innovation. A state was created which lay at the service of the hard-working peasant and the active entrepreneur. No condition is more favourable to classes whose power is a function of the property they possess.

On a longer view, however, the French Revolution is a capital event in the history of Socialism. It is so, I suggest, for four reasons. Before 1789 there was not, in the modern sense, any social problem. Men asked how the poor were to be relieved, not, as afterwards, what part they were to play in the State. The Revolution began that awakening of a social consciousness in the proletariat of which universal suffrage is merely a partial, and by no means the ultimate, consequence. Every radical party thenceforward has found that it must reckon with the wants, indistinct, indeed, and but half-formulated, of the poor ; and every state has discovered that the growth of economic organisation sooner or later transforms the incoherent mass of the poor into a movement ultimately capable of organisation upon the classic lines of party conflict.

This birth of the social question has a special importance for another reason. Before 1789 socialist ideas were

simply moral theories which lived in a vacuum and had no chance of effective realisation. After 1789 they were in a different position. Men had seen the deliberate introduction of proposals the purpose of which was to legislate for equality. The fixation of maximum prices, the abolition of feudal privilege, the confiscation of Church property and the possessions of those hostile to the Revolution, the attempts at progressive taxation and the control of inheritance, these, as experiments, have an importance it is impossible to over-estimate. Doubtless they usually failed; doubtless, also, they were often suggested without conviction and, more often still, applied without sincerity. This is less significant than the fact that men became accustomed to the perception that the State might be made the tactical instrument of those who possessed its machinery. It is less significant, also, than the fact that the Jacobins, not least their representatives on mission, schooled the masses to the understanding that distinctions of wealth are legislative creations, and that, where crisis demands it, egalitarian innovation may be deliberately attempted.

A third reason is outstanding in the impact it has made upon subsequent history. Before 1789 society was divided into privileged and unprivileged; since 1789 it has been divided into rich and poor. The distinction is a notable one. The pre-revolutionary division was the expression of an age-long tradition rooted in the psychology of habit and custom; its landmarks were as mentally familiar to men as the house into which they were born. To the new division the sanction of tradition was no longer attached. Men could see change before their eyes. They could see that the attainment of riches meant food and shelter, clothing and security; they knew that its absence meant hunger and suffering. They learned not only that law could make and unmake the wealthy; they learned also that these opposed such changes in the law as involved sacrifice upon their part. They grew to think of the division as an antagonism of interest, a necessary hostility which could only be bridged by an attack upon the rights of property. From 1793 the life of the Republic was, until the execution of Babeuf, something not unlike a war against the rich in the interest of the poor. The Jacobins waged it, no doubt, for the preservation of the Republic.

The poor who supported them did so, no doubt as well, because they were miserable and hungry, and not because they were socialists. But it was waged, also, with the idea in the background that equality is an ideal, and that the rich are the enemies of equality. The notion permanently remains therefore that great riches are always illegitimate ; and, with the class-conscious worker, the more general view that the weaknesses of society are the outcome of class privilege. This feeling bit the more deeply because of wide disappointment with the results of the Revolution. After the fall of Robespierre the sense was wide-spread that the Revolution which was to benefit the whole community had, in fact, merely aided the bourgeoisie to the detriment of the worker. The latter's revolution, it was felt, was still to come ; it was inherent in the nature of things. In this sense, as the principles of 1789 begin to impregnate the consequences of the factory system, revolutionary socialism became an inevitable part of nineteenth-century ideology.

The final outcome was the definition, with invincible clarity, of the problem of equality in all its aspects. Here I shall not venture to rely upon my own diagnosis, but attempt only to ask some questions. If a people seeks to improve its situation by the alteration of political institutions, and is dissatisfied either with the result itself, or the slowness with which its benefits accumulate, will it be satisfied to remain inactive in the economic sphere? Will it not ask itself, as Tocqueville suggested, whether the privileges of property are not the main obstacle to equality among men, and assert that they are neither necessary nor desirable? If it asks the question, will it not seek to experiment with the possibility of response? Will a new Napoleon be discovered to put a term to their inquiries? But to examine these possibilities would take me far beyond the boundaries of the French Revolution. It must suffice here to say that these questions have been raised, and that the happiness of mankind depends upon the way in which we seek to meet the grave issues they involve.

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Fabian Tract No. 200.

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# THE STATE IN THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER

By HAROLD J. LASKI

With a Note by EDWARD R. PEASE dealing with the history of the Fabian Tracts, on the occasion of the issue of No. 200 of the series.

Published and sold by the Fabian Society at  
11 Dartmouth Street, Westminster, S.W.1.  
Published Dec. 1922. Reprinted October 1928.

Price Twopence.

## FABIAN TRACTS.

FABIAN TRACT NO. 1 was printed in 1884, a few months after the foundation of the Society; the publication of Fabian Tract No. 200 in 1922 affords an occasion for some reflections on the series. Probably no other organisation, certainly no other English political society, has ever before issued a continuous series of Tracts, all in the same format, with a total of two hundred spread over a period of thirty-eight years. Very few of the little group which prepared Tract No. 1 are still alive, and the present writer is the only one of them who is still an active member of the Society. But the work started by that little group has been carried forward chiefly by others who soon joined it, and has accomplished more than its founders anticipated.

Fabian Tracts have been the instrument of much of the activities of the Fabian Society. After the first and enduring success of *Fabian Essays*, we have achieved but little by larger publications. Our members have written innumerable books, but the Society has read but little to do with them. It is as a producer of Tracts that the Society will be remembered.

The two hundred Tracts are a miscellaneous collection. The largest class deals with the application of the principles of Socialism to particular subjects, Education, Poor Law, Agriculture, etc. Another class describes the organs of local government, Parish Councils, Town Councils, County Councils, and explains how their powers can be used for social amelioration. Our "best seller" was a penny pamphlet describing the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1896. Trade Unions bought it by the thousand to distribute amongst their members. A good second is "Facts for Socialists," first published in 1887, and still selling vigorously in its twelfth edition.

The number of Fabian Tracts issued to the public between 1890 and 1922 is 2,775,000. For a short time we gave away propaganda pamphlets, but the cost of this soon proved prohibitive. Apart from the copies of new publications supplied to members, the above figures represent sales. Pamphlets, unless by Prime Ministers, are not a commercial proposition, but Fabian Tracts have on the whole nearly paid their way. Their success may be attributed in the main to two causes, the use of a single format enabling sets to be bound in a volume, and each number in the series to advertise the others; and in the second case, to the great care exercised by the Executive Committee that a high standard of literary excellence, and extreme vigilance for accuracy in statements of fact should always be maintained.

Some of the early Tracts are still in print in new and often revised editions, but very many are altogether out of date for the excellent reason that the legislative reforms which they recommended have long ago become law.

EDW. R. PEASE.

## THE STATE IN THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER.

**T**HIS English political scene has always changed its perspective after a crisis in the national fortunes. The civil wars of the fifteenth century produced the centralised despotism of the Tudors. The sense of national confidence gained from the victory over Spain led the Puritans to resist the Stuart attempt at further usurpation; and the ultimate result of the Great Rebellion was to put the Crown in fetters. War always transforms the foundations of national thought, and the scale of our last experiment has been vast enough to leave no institution or doctrine untouched. It is clear already that its onset marked a new and pronounced epoch in our affairs. Just as the Napoleonic struggle freed the commercial classes from the last remnants of aristocratic control, so, in the long run, it is probable that the main result of the recent conflict will be to bring the working classes to a new position in the state.

The emergence, indeed, of the Labour Party as the main Parliamentary Opposition is not the least important index to the new temper. It means that the Third Estate has ceased to associate the idea of government with the ownership of property. Exactly as the main consequence of the Reform Act of 1832 was the destruction of those political privileges which separated the middle classes from the seat of power, so, it may be suggested, the result of the Reform Act of 1918 will, in the background of war-experience, be the slow destruction of those economic privileges which prevent the access of the workers to the moral assets of the state. It is not, of course, likely that the process will be either logical or straightforward. The English people is not accustomed to make a direct highroad to its intellectual goal. The national method is rather to mitigate the evils we have than fly to obvious benefits of which doctrine can demonstrate the substance. But, based upon the reforms of 1832, the ultimate character of nineteenth century legislation in England was to make a world in which the profits of business men were economically possible and legally secure. So upon the basis of the reforms of 1918 it will be the tendency of legislation in our own day to make a world in which men who have no commodity to sell save their labour will share in a fuller way in the riches that civilisation can offer.

The directions in which that effort will be made are already becoming clear. There is abroad, however half-heartedly, a new sense of the significance of education. If the democracy is to be master in its own house, it must be adequately equipped for its task. Control of the sources of knowledge is the one sure road to power; and it is evidence of high import that the workers themselves are foremost in demanding an educational system which gives them access to that control. Hardly less urgent is the feeling that basic monopolies, coal, power, transport, land, must be directly managed by the people themselves. Nationalisation is a word that has manifold interpretations; but nationalisation, in some form, of the obvious basic monopolies is an inevitable corollary of democratic government. Not less certain, as the future expands, will be the conference upon the workers of definite institutional security against the tragedy of unemployment. That the resources of the state must be used to safeguard its citizens against the hazards of trade is already a commonplace; and since the principle was admitted in the Insurance Act of 1911, it is rather with its administrative application than its legislative substance that the next age will be concerned.

Second only in importance to education, and in large part dependent upon it, is the growth of industrial self-government. It has become intolerable that the mass of men should be the mechanical recipients of orders they are compelled to execute without scrutiny. It has become finally clear that the release of individuality—after all, the ultimate purpose of the state—is utterly impossible so long as the control of industry is confided to a small number of men whose decisions need not take account of the wills of those who work under them. It may be admitted that the transformation of industrial control presents immense difficulties. The mass of the workers has not been trained to work that is instinct with responsibility. The capitalist régime has sought not the men who think but the men who obey. It has subordinated to the acquisitive impulse whatever spirit there is of service and creativeness in those who are subject to its dominion. It has obscured the processes by which it governs. It has so divorced the actual work of production from the business of direction as to leave the industrial pattern unintelligible to those whose lives are dependent upon its right arrangement. So complex have its mechanisms become that no single formula—guild socialism, consumers' co-operation, the multiplication of small peasant proprietorship—has any but a limited application. In the discovery, therefore, of institutions which enable the industrial worker to be something more than a tender of machines it is inevitable that there should be hazardous experiment; and the corollary of experiment is failure. But that feeling of unfreedom which Mr. Justice Sankey discovered among the miners, which interferes with the quantity and quality of their work, is typical of labour as a whole. It demands, as is now recognised, channels of response which will minimise its intensity.

These are, of course, predominant currents of effort in their largest outline. There is no aspect of our social life which remains

unaffected by the impact of new desires. The Industrial Revolution turned urban England into a slum, and since Mr. Sartorius, ably seconded by Sir Alfred Mond, shows no sign of abdication, he is destined, sooner or later, to be supplanted by a community at last awakened to its responsibilities. Housing is the bedrock upon which the health of the nation depends. Parallel with its improvement, there is certain to be a realisation that the development of the medical services is a vital public concern. What are now half-casual and half-starved amenities, the public libraries for instance, are bound, as education develops, to be regarded as charges upon the public income not less fundamental to the general well-being than the army and navy. Nor can such amenities be adequately enjoyed unless the working-day is adjusted to meet their claims. The worker cannot respect the obligations of citizenship if he is simply and solely an unreflecting unit in the productive system. It is, moreover, becoming probable that the centre of importance for most men in the future will be the period of leisure rather than the period of work. In that aspect, the limitation of the hours of labour is fraught with deep consequence to them at a vital point. Nor can the substance of our civilisation remain unaffected by the changing prospects of women. Marriage for most has meant a position akin to that of a trusted servant in an upper-class family, with the added right to frequent the sitting-room, in the rare cases where there is one, when the day's work is done. But women have not only invaded industry in wholesale fashion; they have also come to see that they may make of marriage a career as significant as the bar or the church. They have thus come to regard it in a sense very different either from the faded spinsters of Cranford or the genteel harpies of Jane Austen. What influence their views will have upon our social economy we cannot yet tell; it is clear only that it will be profound and decisive.

Nothing of all this implies either that such changes are immediately impending, or that their path will be easy and straightforward. Their consequences go too deep into the fabric of the state for most of them to be welcome. They involve an assault upon tradition which will invoke the resistance of all the forces of conservatism and inertia. They imply a change in the property-relation so vast as to alter in their implication the very purpose of the state. They will have to proceed piece by piece, advancing here, there suffering defeat, until most of them become in turn traditions. Then, perhaps, in typical English fashion, because they have become institutions to which we have grown accustomed, we shall regard them as the necessary foundations of society. They will, in part, be dependent upon the possibility that we can avoid revolution, on the one hand, and foreign warfare upon the other. If we recognise sufficiently the inevitable basic infirmity in all human institutions so as to be convinced that with all its slowness the path of reason is preferable to the path of violence, that the inadequate good of peace may be preferable to the cost of ideal good attempted by war, an atmosphere of constructiveness may emerge from the present reaction. But only upon the condition of peace. For it is clear that the resources

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now at the command of conflict may, if utilised, destroy any possibility of civilisation. If force should triumph over reason in the next age, ideas such as these may well pass into dim memories; and, as in Mr. Wells' dramatic picture, some ancient survivor of the struggle may seek to explain them to grandchildren who do not understand even the primary notions of civilised life.

But if we may count—it is a large assumption—upon a peace as long and as extensive as that given to England in the Victorian age, we may be confident that social theory will undergo a radical transformation. A new world will arise from the ashes of the old; and a new political science will be necessary to the statement of its meaning. Already, it is possible to discern some at least of the elements that will go to its making. It is likely, in the first place, to be far more complex than the old. The sanction of our institutions will not be divine right, as with the Royalists of the seventeenth century, or fear, as with Hobbes, or the facile simplicity of direct and omnipresent consent, as with Rousseau. It is likely to come from the slow development of a social psychology based upon inductions about human nature far wider than in any previous time. It will take account of the magistral demonstration by Marx that political power is the handmaid of economic power; and it will therefore insist as integral that the existence of great wealth and widespread poverty in the same state are incompatible with the attainment of social good. It will seek to discover the largest way commensurate with national efficiency of associating the creative energies of men with the actual business of government. It will realise that the main reason why social systems have decayed in the past is their inability to make adequate response to the primary impulses of men. For the onset of revolution does not mean the existence of a will to wrong in the people. It is they who always, and most deeply, are the sufferers from disorder. Revolution never comes from the effort of chance conspirators or malevolent ideas. It is the outcome always of wrongs that have become too intolerable to be borne; and the moral judgment it involves is decisive against the government which has failed to see in reform the only real safeguard against it.

The coming of the democracy to power involves a change in the purpose of the state. It means placing the riches of civilisation at the disposal of that democracy. But, still more, it means a change in the methods by which that effort is made. In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, it was believed that the conflict of private interests would result in a well-ordered commonwealth. The duties of government were the duties of a police force. The atmosphere of the courts—always the surest index to the temper of the governing class—was mainly an insistence that in nothing was the public welfare so essentially protected as in the safeguarding of industrial private rights; and the classic case of *Mogul Steamship Co. v. McGregor*<sup>1</sup> was evidence that restraint upon freedom of action in

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<sup>1</sup> (1888) 21 Q.B.D. 544; [1892] A.C. 25.

the name of public policy was regarded as a definite evil. It was somehow assumed that since every person is, in the main, the best judge of his own happiness, the larger the boundaries of freedom of contract, the greater would be the happiness of the nation. It was not understood that there is a difference between judging what is for one's happiness, and having the means to effect it. Freedom of contract only begins, as Mr. Justice Holmes has said, where equality of bargaining power begins; and there is no real equality of bargaining power, so far as the means of adequate subsistence are concerned, unless there is approximate equality of property. When Bentham and his disciples set an individualistic perspective to the theory of the state, what in reality they did was simply to put that state at the disposal of the owners of political and economic power. The second half of the nineteenth century was mainly occupied with the effort to relax the rigours of an individualistic régime, while retaining an active and profound faith in its main assumptions. Such measures as Factory Acts, Employers' Liability Acts, Housing Acts, were, at bottom, concessions made to humanitarian sentiment which shuddered at the cost of *laissez-faire*. They did not involve a belief that it is the business of the state to see that the citizen realises the full power of moral development which is in him.

Until, roughly, 1870, Benthamism held practically unmitigated sway over the English mind. From then onwards, T. H. Green and the Oxford idealists wrought something akin to revolution in the English theory of the state. Trained in a Platonism sharpened by contact with Hegel, they recognised that the Benthamite opposition between state and individual was at once artificial and dangerous. The individual was a citizen, and he therefore had no meaning apart from his citizenship. Unless, then, the state could guarantee to each man the powers without which he could not realise himself, it became devoid of ethical content. The state was, for them, an instrument through which and in which its citizens realised themselves; and it was thus its main function to secure to each such rights as would achieve his full moral development. There can be no doubt of the high service rendered by the idealist philosophy in destroying the notion that state-intervention is, in its nature, an evil thing. Unfortunately, the failure of idealism lay in its inability to differentiate between state and government. It did not with any sharpness disentangle the acts of principal and agent, with the result that it confused the temporary acts of the latter with the permanent purpose of the former.

The idealist philosophy of the state so highly exalted its power that individuals and societies obtained their meaning, and, therefore, their rights, only by its permission. It was so occupied with the theoretic purpose of the abstract state that it hardly, T. H. Green apart, regarded the actual achievement of concrete states. It did not see that a purpose abstractly noble may, in the hands of human agents, be stripped of every whit of moral splendour. By insisting that every institution was the incarnation of a spiritual principle idealism failed to develop a theory of moral values, and was therefore

unable to distinguish between degrees of right. It thus provided no solution for the situation where social obligations conflict. It so confounded the actual motives of social agents with the ideal purpose by which they ought to have been informed, that it detected the existence of benevolent progress where none in fact existed. It beatified Imperialism, for example; and the noble picture of the white man's burden blinded the eyes of its devotees to the natives who were in fact bearing it. It did not help a miner called upon to choose between his union and the Prime Minister to be told that the latter represented an institution whose abstract end was good. It afforded no real direction to a Quaker who believed in the moral wrong of war to be informed that war might be exalted when the state undertook it. Idealism, in short, tended to beatify things as they are. It was too occupied with abstract ends to be sufficiently critical either about the time-factor in the process of their achievement, or the methods by which they were effected. It asserted, and with justice, that right and truth ought to prevail; but its actual result, in the hands of its chief exponents, was to identify right and truth merely with the decisions of the governmental authority legally competent to make them. It did not penetrate beyond those decisions to the sources from which they were derived.

It was possible, in the years before the war, to see that idealism as a political creed was rapidly losing ground. It had become a commonplace that the authority of the state, neither in its forms nor in its achievement, justified the allegiance it demanded. Socialism came in its varied guises to offer proof that the state did not secure either the freedom or the happiness of its members. Churchmen like Figgis came to see that its assumed pre-eminence might deprive voluntary organisations of powers necessary to the fulfilment of aims not less noble than its own. Lawyers like Maitland urged that the state was merely one form of human association, and that it could make no moral claim to sovereignty other than that which it could prove on the ground of moral achievement. The survival of its power, especially in the background of European revolution, has become dependent, in part upon the national inertia of men, in part also upon its ability to respond to new wills and new demands that had, before the war, been hardly organised or articulate. It is true, of course, as Mr. Barker has said, that the state-being-with-us, we must make the best of it. But what has moved into the hinterland of doubt are the motives which underlie its institutions and the forms they use for their expression.

The society in which we live is organised upon the basis of property. Ownership confers rights, and rights are legally unrelated to the performance of service. The society towards which we are moving will be organised upon the basis of functions, and the rights it will confer will be dependent upon the functions we perform. For it is obvious to anyone who scrutinises the present social order that the one thing it has secured is a continuously larger production. It has not regarded equity in the distribution of the product. It has not achieved even a minimum level of decent existence for the mass

of the producers. It has never, above all, sought to stimulate at their highest level the creative energies of men. But the test of social institutions is the extent to which they develop those creative energies for social ends. If we assume a moral ideal that is capable of being aimed at by the state, each individual is clearly entitled to those rights which enable him to contribute to its attainment; he must be enabled, that is to say, to fulfil his moral vocation as a man. But the outstanding feature of the present society is that most men have, substantially, no rights at all, while those who do possess them are not bound to the service that they ought to involve.

The consequence may be seen in the absence of a common purpose binding men together in the state. There is, of course, common dependence in the sense that if an employer secures orders, his men secure work; and that he, in turn, depends upon their labour for the fulfilment of his contract. But the absence of any principle in the method of distribution leaves the partition of the product simply to the pressure of opposing forces, and the result is what is called the class-war. So long as that social disharmony persists, the currents of social activity can never so flow together as to converge into a single channel. Nor can any institution which is touched by that disharmony really attract the motives which promote civilisation. For the absence of principle at the root is bound to affect the upper branches of the tree. If we start, not from the assumption that property has rights because it is property, but that socially valuable functions require rights in order that the individuals fulfilling those functions may achieve their end, in proportion as those ends are realised, the foundation of disharmony disappears. We then move to the conception of a minimum basis of civilisation secured to each individual in order that his citizenship may be possible. Beyond that, because the interest of the state in the happiness of its members is equal, we attempt the maximisation of equal opportunity. We do not, that is to say, associate opportunity with a status that is mainly economic, but with the mere fact that the individual, as a member of the state, must be given the fullest chance to prove his worth.

It is perhaps worth while insisting that this is not an effort after identity. Equality of opportunity is simply the admission that unless each citizen has an equal access to the heritage of the state, the persistence of disharmony, with the internecine warfare it entails, is certain. It is, moreover, clear that men will very variously avail themselves of the equal opportunities conferred. Their tastes are not the same. Some are by nature leaders; to others, the temptation to inert acceptance of direction is irresistible. In particular, it does not seem probable that the increase of interest in politics will be as intense as is usually supposed. The social nature of men must always be carefully distinguished from the political nature of some few. The average member of Parliament, even, is not there because he has a love of state-building. He is there, like Sir Frederick Banbury, to defend an economic interest threatened from within, or, as in the case of many retired business men, because

the House of Commons is an avenue towards certain social distinctions that are prized by their class. Equality of opportunity will undoubtedly multiply the number of citizens fit for political function. But the two important possibilities it opens are, first, that the state becomes informed by a common purpose, and, second, that it is enabled to utilise the reservoir of talent that, with the present disparity, is bound to remain largely undiscovered.

Nor does this doctrine involve the abolition of property as such. It simply limits the rights of ownership by insisting that they shall be conditioned by the performance of service. It must, of course, further limit those rights by organising social institutions in such a fashion that they leave each citizen who desires the sense of freedom in their working to perform, where he has the capacity, responsible functions. It involves, that is to say, the democratisation of industrial control, and the decentralisation of political control. It means for the mines such a form of organisation as that, for instance, which Mr. Justice Sankey has depicted. There, at least, in pit, in district, and in the industry as a whole, the abolition of private ownership would remove barriers which now stand in the path of service and achievement. The miner who could convince his fellows that he was competent to direct their labours could test his powers in an increasingly wider field. So, too, in another sphere, with local government. At present, the amenities the latter can secure are limited by parliamentary enactments devised at every point in the interest of ratepayers and ground-landlords. If, apart from the need of general reorganisation, a compulsory minimum were fixed centrally, and the degree of effort beyond that minimum left to the local authority, many of the shadows that now lie across the face of English life would disappear. For the truth is that, in the eyes of property owners, extravagance is not the sin of Poplar, but the desire of its councillors to make the lives of their constituents less empty of the aids to well-being that Belgravia can afford. It is the notion of using the national resources for the purpose of promoting equality against which the defenders of the present system are adamant. Yet, whether in industry or politics, democratisation tempered by *expertise* is the only path to creativeness.

In any philosophy which seeks the grounds of national co-operation, a thorough grasp of the significance of such equality is fundamental. The miners who went on strike in 1921 knew not less well than other citizens that they imperilled by so doing the foundations of the economic security afforded by the present system. But because that system was unequal in its operation they had the less interest in the maintenance of its stability than those who, owning it, denounced them. Just as, during the war, the system of rationing produced better health in the nation because the food consumed, though less in quantity and quality, was more fairly distributed, so in the general organisation of social life, men who feel that the product is equally available in return for equal service will be willing to serve gratefully and in full measure. / Let it be added, too, that equality implies a higher standard of knowledge and effort than can

now be secured. Democracy, it is obvious, has as much need to test the standards of its performance as the chemist to test the accuracy of his balance. Equality must always be conditioned by the establishment of criteria of qualification for the performance of functions. But these criteria will not be resented where they bear equally upon all. Where they are destructive of social solidarity is in their inequality of operation. The son who inherits his father's business because he is the accident of an accident, the nobleman who becomes a company director, the judge's son who becomes clerk of assize, are examples of the acquisition of status without qualification which imperil the co-ordination of effort. The average working-man does not begrudge the standards of entrance to the civil service; but he rightly resents the inequalities of an educational system which, practically speaking, prevents his children from being able to attain that standard. The absence of an equal interest in the assets of the state inevitably begets an inferior interest in the maintenance of its foundations; and it is the obvious lesson of our experience that the inferior interest of the many is the active hatred of the few. No state can long survive in which a group of citizens aim, through profound moral conviction, at its overthrow. That is why the movement towards equality is the one sure safeguard against revolution.

It is doubtful, indeed, if ends such as these can in any full measure be attained through the classical institutions of representative government. We have evolved the great society without any real effort to see that our political methods keep pace with the changes in social and economic structure. No one who examines the large outlines of the English governmental system can point to any capital discovery in the past fifty years. The emergence of the Labour Party has altered the general perspective of their effort. The transference of the centre of importance from the House of Commons to the Cabinet, the consolidation of that pre-eminence given by Mr. Gladstone's long career to the office of Prime Minister, a superb improvement in the quality of the civil service, these, and things like these, have an importance beyond denial. But the normal assumptions which, for example, Bentham had in mind in the prophecies he made for the future of the representative system have ceased to work. The private member is a pale ghost of his former self. Debate has become utterly unreal; and divisions merely register mechanically decisions the real grounds of which are rarely determined in the House of Commons. The old system of party government has lost its mainspring; and the suspicious inertia of those who are not active in the machine itself is a commonplace. Nor is all this true of England alone. In France, in Italy, and in the United States, the same disharmony between political method and the social process may be detected. The legislative assembly is not merely overburdened by the pressure of its work; it is, in its classic form, unfitted to carry out the functions for which it exists.

It is, of course, possible to improve the actual machinery we have. Members of Parliament could be given direct contact with the business of administration by the creation of committees to watch

the work of each department. They might be in part organs of consultation, and in part an effective and necessary *liaison* between the bureaucrat and the House of Commons. The transformation of the present committee-stage of bills into a process akin to the working of committees upon municipal bodies would not only destroy much deliberate obstruction, but it would also ensure to the private member a more real understanding of the measures upon which he votes, and a more real consideration than he now receives. A reduction in the size of the Cabinet has become clearly essential to the vital habit of corporate decision ; and it is at least equally clear that there does not exist in the civil government any body whose business it is to undertake the investigation and research that are necessary to the proper working of policy. Nor are the functions of the different departments allocated upon any coherent principle. Until each department has before it a properly organised field of activity, there is bound to be waste and confusion. At present, there is overlapping and cross-division to a degree that makes officials surrender to contests for control with other officials time that should be given to creative work. No one can doubt that the serious consideration of political institutions could result in inventions for their improvement of capital importance.

Yet even if these and similar changes were effected the modern legislative system would be inadequate to its task. That there are many functions, the provision of law and justice, the maintenance of the national health, the provision of public education, defence and foreign policy, which require an undivided communal organ for their general direction, is clear enough. But when we pass from functions such as these, which concern men as citizens rather than men as producers, analysis makes it obvious that the simple formulæ of representative government do not apply. What we need, then, is to take the services that have to be performed and devise institutions for their government. We have so to devise them that we may secure to each function the rights without which citizenship is impossible, and, within the boundaries of that limiting principle, to free the general legislative assembly from the task of intimate and incessant supervision. It is not, in any case, fit for such a task ; for, as Mill long ago pointed out, a popular assembly is in its nature unfitted to administer or dictate in detail to those who control administration. Here it becomes necessary to depart from the narrowly geographical habit of our political thinking. We must learn to think of railways and mines, cotton and agriculture, as areas of government just as real as London and Lancashire. They are relatively unified functions which need, just as much as geographical units, organs of administration. Clearly, of course, it is easier to give a simple form of institutionalism to an industry like mining, which is susceptible of immediate nationalisation, than to a industry like cotton-spinning, in which the formulæ of nationalisation are far more dubious. But, granted the conference of powers to a representative assembly for the cotton industry, granted, also, the principles of citizenship within which it must work, it is not difficult to imagine mechanisms

through which a constitutional system of government might work there. As with the mines, it is necessary to give representation in such a functional assembly to interests which need special protection—the consumer, the technician, allied industries in a special sense related to cotton. It is necessary, also, to use such associations as the trade unions and the employers' federations as the basis upon which selections of personnel must be made. Nor should any barriers be put in the way of joint consultation between industry and industry. Whether a national economic council is implied in such a scheme as this it is very difficult to say. The problem of its constitution is extraordinarily complex; and the solution of general industrial questions is, as a rule, really the solution of problems of citizenship which come within the scope of Parliament. Their administration is almost always a special problem of a particular function, and is better left to the function for settlement. When the German Economic Council has had a longer life we shall be better able to judge the possibilities it involves.

It may be useful at this stage to indicate the institutional pattern implied in a social philosophy of this kind. We visualise a Parliament with the taxing power, which lays down fundamental rules, and administers, through the Cabinet, the matters of general citizenship. Below it would be territorial and functional institutions. The one would be concerned with the normal subject matter of local government; and, under the revised areas of control, they would possess that greater complex of powers characteristic of the first-class German municipality, rather than the narrow delegation inherent in the British system. Each industry would possess an industrial council in which management and labour, technicians and the representatives of allied industries, together with the representatives of the public, would take their place. Such a council would have as its business the application to the industry it controlled of the minimum basis of civilisation we have suggested as now fundamental. It would consider all questions affecting industrial relations within its scope of reference. It would issue decrees, perhaps of the nature of provisional orders, where it was desired to go beyond the principles of the national minimum. It would undertake research; and it would have a special costings and audit department of which the task would be to secure complete publicity upon the details of the business process within the trade. It is possible, also, that a National Industrial Council would be required; but it is doubtful whether it is possible to build it, and uncertain whether the questions it would seek to resolve are not, in fact, problems with which the ordinary Parliament is better able to deal.

At the back of all this lies an implied insistence upon education as the main channel of hope in our ultimate relief. For if the object of the state is to enrich the social heritage through the enlargement of individual personality, then individual personality must be given that power of adequate expression which comes through knowledge to make its needs known. At bottom, therefore, the problem is the instruction of individual wills, and the building, a

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MEMORIAL TRUST LECTURES  
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# THE DECLINE OF LIBERALISM

*by*  
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*Delivered on 24 MAY 1940  
at Canterbury Hall  
(London School of Economics)  
London*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON : HUMPHREY MILFORD  
1940

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
AMEN HOUSE, E.C. 4  
London Edinburgh Glasgow New York  
Toronto Melbourne Capetown Bombay  
Calcutta Madras  
HUMPHREY MILFORD  
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

## THE DECLINE OF LIBERALISM

### I

**I**N the period between the death of T. H. Green and our own day, no social philosopher in Britain did more to relate his principles to the living necessities of action than Leonard Hobhouse. His whole life was a singularly noble example of that marriage between abstract principle and concrete practice which alone gives the thinker a realistic insight into the problems of his age. He sought with energy, by deed not less than by precept, to enlarge the number of those to whom the idea of liberty has a positive and dynamic meaning. He fought with passion against that doctrine of bigness for its own sake, the debate about which made the South African War an epoch in our history. He worked with ardour to establish by legal action adequate standards of life for the underprivileged. He was a great journalist, whose work on the *Manchester Guardian* did honour even to that most honourable of journals. He was a great teacher who influenced by his ideas and his example forty years of student life. I know no one, save perhaps John Stuart Mill, whose name would more instantly occur to the mind as the embodiment of that liberalism he so deeply cherished.

Yet we must, if we are to be honest, admit that the liberalism for which Hobhouse battled so bravely has suffered an eclipse as startling and as complete as that which attended the doctrine of the divine right of kings after the Revolution of 1688. Whether that eclipse is justified, I am not here concerned to examine. What

I should like to analyse the causes of its decline, the reasons why men, if more upon the European continent than with ourselves, yet, in a real degree with ourselves also, have set their political compass by other stars. It is, on any showing, a remarkable spectacle; for those of us who are still in middle age cannot but remember how, in 1919, men dared widely to hope that the ideals of liberal democracy had entered upon a long period of triumphant recognition. Those ideals, moreover, had immense achievements to their credit. They had given a new status to individual personality; they had made religious toleration and representative government part of the necessary baggage of a civilized man; they had established the right of scientific discovery to prevail against the claims of authority from whatever sphere those claims might be put forward; not least, at any rate to this generation, they had gone far towards the insistence that war is not a legitimate method of state policy.

To-day, over wide areas, the validity of these ideals is passionately renounced. Not since the Wars of Religion has the worth of individual personality been at a heavier discount. Religious toleration is rejected by a government which controls the destinies of eighty million people. Representative government is ever more narrowly confined by dictators who claim to know the 'real' will of their peoples—that 'real will' whose dangers Hobhouse so incisively exposed—better than their peoples know it themselves. Scientific discovery, even in the realm of nature, is subordinated to political necessity over wide areas of the world; compare the position of Einstein in exile from the land to which he did so much honour with Sir Humphrey Davy, awarded

a medal by the Institute of France in the midst of the Napoleonic wars, and it is difficult to believe in the reality of progress. Where liberalism believed in the right of reason to an unlimited empire, the new gospels make of reason the slave of a might that alone is asserted to have title to power over the lives of men. Even the intellectuals, to whom the principle of free inquiry might have been deemed the ultimate groundwork of their existence, have embarked as hired mercenaries in armies which wage new creed-wars as ugly as any in the historic record.

What has happened that sober analysis should lead us to so grim a conclusion? We must go to history for an answer; and if, in seeking to make it, I deal not with the abstract concepts of liberalism, but with the concrete experience in which those concepts can only be grasped in proper perspective, I do so, not to decry a noble creed, but to understand the limitations which attach to all creeds put into practice by human, and, therefore, fallible men. For liberalism, let us remember, was not developed by its makers as a system *in vacuo*; it was a fighting creed seeking to attain specific objectives. It sought, as all human creeds have sought, to make its particulars universals; it failed, as, again, all human creeds fail, to realize that these particulars limit, especially in time, the power to attain the status of universality. For the result is always an inability in a given creed to transcend the circumstances of its origin, to see beyond the immediacies of one age into the rapidly changing perspectives of its successor. The weakness of liberalism, historically, did not lie in the fundamental method of its approach; it lay in its inability to recognize how to adapt that approach to a new

world for which it was unprepared. The life of a fighting creed lies in its power to extend rapidly the application of its principles to areas which, when the claim for innovation is made, are outside the traditional fields of analysis. Historically, I think, it can be shown that it is in its failure to see the need for this extension—a failure intelligible enough in the light of its origins—that the causes of the liberal eclipse are to be found.

## II

The doctrinal roots of liberalism are extraordinarily complex, and reach far back in our history. In its modern expression, we can, I believe, detect two main strands in its composition. The first, and the one that is, I think, the most fundamental, goes back through Bentham and the Philosophic Radicals first to Adam Smith and thence to Locke where it is linked at once to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, on the one hand, and to a somewhat rigorous doctrine of natural rights which connects it with the medieval conceptions of natural law, with their divine sanctions and immanent teleology, on the other. The second strand, if more modern in immediate origin, goes back in time to Greek conceptions of the state. T. H. Green is its best exponent in the nineteenth, as Hobhouse has, so far, been by all odds its best exponent in the twentieth century. But Green is closely connected with an idealist tradition which, in the persons of Coleridge and Southey, are nearly related to the Romantic revival; and this, in its turn, is deeply based on that medieval conception of society as an organism which the first strand of liberal doctrine did so much to destroy. The

antithesis between these two aspects of liberalism, the one negative, the other positive, the one atomic, the other organic, the one finding the essence of the individual in his antagonism to the state, the other finding his essence in the context given him by the state, already goes a long way towards explaining the crisis which has shattered the liberal fortunes.

The stream of tendency which derives from Locke is unmistakable. In him we find an individual with a ready-made body of rights it is the business of the state to preserve. For him their enemy is government; and it is the primary assumption of his argument that liberty and government are antithetic terms. He assumes a man who, outside of society, has reason; and he does not suppose that the state can do more than protect him in the consequences of its exercise. His individual, moreover, is a man possessed of property; and there is no part of Locke's *Second treatise* more eloquent than that in which he emphasizes the individual's inalienable right to be safeguarded in its possession. This emphasis is, of course, one of the reasons for the success of his book. Property, he said, is that with which a man 'hath mixed his labour'; the definition fell gratefully upon the ears of a generation accustomed to arbitrary taxation by government and obsolete interference, as the business men deemed it, of the Courts, with the right of a man to win economic success by his own effort, unhampered by the irritating restrictions of a still largely feudal common law. Locke was writing a magisterial defence of the right of men of property to enjoy its fruits without constant impediment from a government at once corrupt and inefficient and arbitrary—Government was the enemy; liberty of the individual

and government action are mighty opposites. This is, above all, the postulate from which liberalism starts. I do not need to emphasize how wide is the hold it still maintains.

For Locke, and, indeed, for that eighteenth century he so profoundly influenced, the postulate meant that the less a government governs, the more free are its citizens. They then follow the rule of reason which is, in substance, natural law. But in the expanding economy of the eighteenth century this is virtually to equate natural law with *laissez-faire*, to argue that what the successful men of the time demanded was also what, by a supremely fortunate coincidence, Nature itself intended. This outlook was given its letters of credit by Adam Smith, even though he accepted it with characteristically careful qualifications. For Adam Smith insisted that social well-being is the outcome of individual activity and that this is broadly the greater the less it is hampered by government interference. The more 'free' the economic process, the more the 'invisible hand', by a mysterious alchemy never, I think, fully explained, leads to the betterment of the whole of society and of each man in society. The felt needs of business men in an age of great economic expansion become 'natural laws', the positive action of the state then becomes artificial because it is an interference with 'natural laws', and since, clearly, the rule of 'natural law' is freedom, government becomes, almost by definition, the enemy of freedom. Carlyle's 'anarchy plus a constable' is no bad description of the ideal as it formulated itself to the men whose energy and inventiveness were so rapidly making Britain the first industrial power in the world.

Though some of the implications of the Benthamite

philosophy differ widely from those of the 'simple system of natural liberty' of which Locke and Adam Smith were the protagonists, the causes of its success were much the same. Bentham and his disciples swept away the defences of an outworn political system which left substantial power in the hands of the great landowners; thereby they created political forms through which the middle class could get the legislation it wanted. So, too, their comprehensive attack on the judicial procedure and legal principles of their day cleared the way for the full operation of the new industrial forces of which that middle class was the supreme expression. I do not, of course, mean that this was the purpose that the Benthamites had in view; they recognized the 'sinister interest' of the *entrepreneur* as not less a danger than that of the landed aristocracy. What I mean is rather that the support they gained was for ends far narrower than those they conceived themselves to be defining. For when the middle class had wrested from Benthamite principles the changes it desired, it was tempted to believe that the main work of liberalism had been done.

I gladly recognize that this conclusion is not inherent in Benthamism. The 'greatest happiness principle' can logically justify the positive not less than the negative state. I gladly recognize, also, that most of the administrative expedients—the vital procedures of liberalism—which have made the positive state possible were the work of Bentham himself or of his school. But the main doctrinal impact of Benthamism was, partly from its psychological assumptions, and partly from its atomistic, and, therefore, individualist view of the state, towards a clearing of the ground from past corruption

rather than towards a sense of the state as a social organ which could positively and directly contribute to human happiness. It is impossible to overestimate the value of the Benthamite contribution to social progress; there is a sense in which its inventive genius made possible the movement away from the emphasis upon *laisser-faire*, with its inference that the state is man's enemy. But much else was necessary to bring out these possibilities.

Something is due to the widening of the franchise; something more to the pressure exerted by the growing power of trade unions; something, again, to the new spirit of scientific inquiry which made possible that magnificent series of early Victorian blue-books without which, let us ceaselessly remember, Marx could never have written his flaming indictment of capitalism. Nor must we omit the denunciations of industrialism which from Southey and Carlyle, through the Christian Socialists and Arnold and Ruskin, to William Morris, co-operated with the demands of the working-class to insist upon the building of an England different from that so rapturously surveyed by Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby. Here let me note that the change owes not a little to Charles Dickens. He may not have known what ought to be done; but at least his magnificent indignation played a real part in awakening the social conscience to the tragic results of *laisser-faire*.

You can see the process of fertilization set out in a remarkable way in the *Autobiography* of John Stuart Mill; perhaps, indeed, the publication of his essay on Coleridge (1840) is, as good a date as any for marking the beginning of the slow erosion of the negative phase in liberalism. That date marked in Mill the realization that society is not merely an aggregate of individuals

but a process in which the interaction between men and institutions is of fundamental importance. Thereby, he was connected with the new turn given to social thought by that Oxford School in which T. H. Green remains the outstanding figure. Green saw how frail a foundation individualist liberalism provided for an effective common life. Its atomic view of the state and its associationist psychology alike threatened the permanence of the social bond. Writing in the epoch when collectivist action had become urgent if the patent deficiencies of a *laissez-faire* society were to be corrected, Green and his followers emphasized not the individual over against the process of government, but the individual in the significant totality of his relations with it. The purpose of government is to safeguard and to foster all those relations which enable man to be himself at his best. Negatively, it must remove the hindrances to the good life; positively it must promote those things, especially public education, which enable the citizen to do and to enjoy those things which are worth doing and enjoying.

It is not true to say that Green gave a new content to liberalism; events themselves had of necessity done that. But it is, I think, true to say that he gave to the idea of positive liberalism its letters of credit. He made it seem legitimate for organized society to use its power to establish a freedom for individuals that is actual rather than formal. He provided a philosophy which emphasized the degree to which we are members one of another, in which, therefore, the corporate action of government must establish the conditions in which the good of all is genuinely included in the good of each. He denied the philosophy of liberalism which would

limit the action of the state to police measures on the one hand and to measures of mitigation on the other. He brought his age face to face with the problem of social organization and the relations it imposes. He showed that men are not free, as the earlier liberalism deemed them free, because they have the vote and can read the daily press. He saw that liberty of contract is not an exhaustive summary of the purposes the state must set before itself.

Under the philosophic auspices of Green, not least as his doctrine was given both a deeper and wider social content by Hobhouse, the main gains in the legislation of the last fifty years are to be recorded. The gains were great, and it is a poor service to historical truth to deny their magnitude. There was yet an inherent weakness in the argument of which the consequences have been important. It is a weakness less obvious in Green and Hobhouse than in their disciples, largely, I think, because they were not only speculative philosophers but men themselves deeply concerned to bring about practical changes they saw to be desirable. The weakness was the faith in the inevitable march of objective mind which they regarded as embodied in the state. They rejected the anti-historical views of the Benthamites. But they fell into the opposite error of divorcing the process of history from the deliberately willed effort of individuals to plan social change in a wholesale way. What Providence was to Burke, what the idea was to Hegel, the common good was to Green; there is even a danger of Hobhouse's conception of harmony being so regarded. Given goodwill, they tended to believe that history made itself, and beneficently, if it was only left alone. They therefore tended to look less to the

foundations of the state than the particular items of policy they were compelled to confront by the demands of any particular time. They believed in the necessary unity of society; they did not see that we have deliberately to plan institutions and processes through which this unity is achieved. They believed in a pre-existent good in society; they did not see that we have deliberately to create this common good by building the necessary institutions and processes through which it becomes possible. They believed, because of this, that the action of the state is neutral, because they saw it as the expression of a common mind in society achieving a common good. When Green rejected the view that force is the basis of the state, he refused to look the facts in the face.

### III

The result of the conjuncture of these different strands of thought is the eclipse of the liberalism we confront to-day. Perhaps I may best put it by saying that the earlier liberals released the individual from a type of social organization which restricted his capacity for growth. But the assumption which underlay that release made it in fact valid only for men who were in a position to surmount the conditions of a fiercely competitive industrial society, that is, broadly, the owners of property. The liberty predominantly secured was their liberty; the others came in as residuary legatees of their triumph. And when the men of property had won, they conceived that the campaign was over. You can still catch the confidence of their victory in the triumphant perorations of Macaulay. What they did not see was that the new social order their liberalism

had built brought with it new problems as intense as any they had solved.

Mostly, they were economic problems, connected with security, and social problems connected with equality. Liberalism had won a victory for the middle class with the assistance of the workers. It had established a freedom in which, formally and legally, the workers were entitled to share. Actually, they could not, for the most part, share in it because its attainment was predominantly conditioned to the possession of property; and they had no property save in their labour-power. When the victors were asked to extend the privileges their new freedom had brought them they were dismayed. The state, to many of them, was being asked to do for the unsuccessful what the successful did for themselves; and it was being asked to do it at the expense of the successful. The successful then produced a whole armoury of argument to prove that this was undesirable; and, for a long time, they were able to have their way. That is why, to take one example only, our educational system remains so tragically incomplete. They did not understand that the privileges they enjoyed were a social production, that the failure of the masses to achieve those privileges was not the outcome of individual fault. They were suspicious of government. They thought of liberty above all as freedom from its interference. They had little insight into the meaning of those economic forces which largely depersonalized industry, threw the burden of unemployment upon the worker and private charity, and assumed that social control of the effects of industrialization is the erosion of responsibility in the individual. They did not understand that in any society where

economic power is possessed by a small part of the population, there cannot be the effective enjoyment of liberty by the many. They did not understand, either, that men think differently who live differently, and that a simple faith in the power of reason to win common ground will not do because between those who live so differently there is not, in fact, a common language.

The Benthamites, I note in passing, did understand this; hence Bentham's constant warning that only the social control of vested interests will preserve freedom for the many. Bentham thought that representative government based on universal suffrage and a free press would provide this social control, and he had immense confidence in the power of time. But, in fact, Bentham failed to see that universal suffrage would tempt the masses to use their political power for economic readjustment, and that this would seem to the privileged, the more urgently it was advocated, a threat to their security; nor could he, of course, envisage the development of the press into a department of big business. He stated magistrally for his time the concrete oppressions from which men sought emancipation. That was an immense achievement, on any showing; but his lack of an historical sense prevented him, I believe, from seeing deeply into the permanent nature of the problem of freedom.

That permanent nature is the need to recognize the relativity of freedom to conditions of time and place. Liberty in any given age will mean freedom from those forces felt as oppressive in that age. Now it is freedom from religious tyranny; now it is freedom from the bonds of aristocratic privilege or monarchical despotism; to Bentham's age, it was freedom from those legal

and political restrictions which prevented men of property from exploiting, above all in the industrial field, the forces of production. But when the men of Bentham's time won that freedom they built, necessarily, certain relations of production which, in a changing economic society, began to be felt as oppressive by the men involved in them. Where the new masters saw only the immense increase of wealth, those whom they employed came to see, ever more starkly, their insecurity, their lack of access to the cultural heritage of the race, the grim inequalities of condition between rich and poor. What seemed freedom to their masters seemed a denial of freedom to themselves. What was the answer of liberalism to their complaint?

It was made in two forms, because the two conflicting strands in liberalism, of which I have spoken, did not agree upon any unified answer. It was either the reply that the insecurity and the inequalities were part of the order of nature, with which society interfered at its peril; or it was the answer, emerging from the philosophy of Green and, to a lesser extent, of Hobhouse, that response must be made to those claims too pressing to brook denial. I do not want to speak the language of harshness. But I do not think it is an unfair comment upon liberal legislation during the past forty years to say that it was prepared to be forced to be generous where it was not prepared spontaneously to be just. It made concessions, now here and now there, some of them, I admit, big concessions. But it was never ready to undertake that wholesale re-examination of social foundations that was called for, because its votaries could not bring themselves to believe that it was, in very truth, the foundations that had been called into question.

Yet that was the sober fact. And it was so because, essentially, of two things. On the one hand, as was grimly evidenced by economic and international crisis, the relations of production were out of harmony with the forces of production so that men felt, as at the time of the birth of capitalism, that the vested interests protected by the state compelled an economics of scarcity where there was the prospect of an economics of abundance. On the other hand, the ability of political democracy to operate in the economic field—historically a logical consequence of its inherent principles—was increasingly challenged by those whose vested privileges would be affected by such an extension of democratic operations. The result was the growth of fear among those who felt their privileges insecure. Where fear takes hold of men's minds questions of justice are transformed into questions of power. Reason and tolerance are at once at a discount; or, rather, the only reason to which men on either side are prepared to listen is the reason which confirms the policy they approve. At such a point, the basic procedures of liberalism, free inquiry, acceptance of democratic decisions, the preservation of individual freedom, are not likely to be highly regarded. A social order whose way of life is challenged will not easily accept the methods of a debating society.

I am arguing that the evolution of social forces, particularly of economic forces, has made the major doctrines of liberalism the instrument of a system of vested interests, and that liberal procedures can only survive by adapting those major doctrines to a situation which, so far, the philosophers of liberalism have steadfastly refused to confront. No one is more convinced than I am of the value of those procedures. But con-

viction of their value is not the same thing as belief that they will be used. We have lived for two generations before the compulsion of the call for drastic change. We have met it either by casual and interstitial improvisation or, even worse, by the refusal to recognize its urgency. That is true in the economic field; it is true in the social, witness the twin problems of education and nutrition; it is true in the field of empire; it is, alas, tragically true in the field of international relations. Instead of the wholesale planning of our social order in terms of historic experience scientifically estimated, we have drifted to profound disunity at home and totalitarian conflict abroad. And the liberal answer to our situation has not been the revision of its basic concepts; it has been merely the emphasis, which no one denies until catastrophe is imminent, upon the value of its procedures.

The temptation is to show that this is the case by examining some of the current expressions of liberal philosophy in terms of the situation we confront. I shall avoid that temptation, particularly in this place, partly because it is a delicate task, and partly because, if we examine an alien experience, we can view it with some detachment. From this angle, I invite your attention to the Roosevelt experiment in the United States. There was a civilization built upon the maxims which business men approve, in which, also, for nearly eighty years they had enjoyed an unchallenged pre-eminence. No country had usable resources more vast; none had at its disposal a technological skill more widespread or more profound. The principles of *laissez-faire* economics dominated in an unexampled degree the American public mind. And it was a society, let us remember, more

free from the impact of that quasi-feudal tradition which is still so influential in Europe than any other society in the world except the Soviet Union.

Yet when President Roosevelt took office on 4 March 1933 he confronted economic chaos. He had, as it were overnight, to improvise the positive state. He had to deal with an army of unemployed which, with their dependents, numbered something like one-third of the population. Most of the measures upon which he embarked to salvage American civilization were measures that have been European commonplaces for a generation. Let us admit that he has made grave mistakes; it is still true that, without his measures, the United States would not be to-day a peaceful going concern, for, as Mr. Keynes has well said, men will not always starve quietly. Yet the Roosevelt programme has been met with an organized hatred, a relentless antagonism, for which it is difficult to find an analogy in American history since the days of Andrew Jackson. Liberalism produced in answer to the problem he sought to solve all the outworn doctrines that fitted an America long dead. Sometimes an obsolete doctrine of 'natural rights' was refurbished by the Courts to strike down mild social legislation as unconstitutional. Sometimes the 'rugged individualism' of a frontier long obsolete was dragged from the dead history where it belonged to argue that the use of the state-power in the interests of the masses was un-American; as though 'Americanism' was a static concept which involved the right of business men permanently to control the policies of the state. The thesis of the opposition to the 'New Deal' was that social change must not be socially directed, but must come from the uncontrolled and unco-ordinated effort of

private enterprise. The sceptre of power, so to say, must be restored to that 'invisible hand' which had so signally failed to use it creatively in the years which preceded President Roosevelt's accession to office.

The result can be simply put. Social tension in the United States cuts deeper than at any time since the Civil War. Party alignments have ceased—a very dangerous thing in a representative democracy—to have any effective relation to the problems of the time. Strong leadership in a positive direction is called for; and its least expression is denounced as tyranny by the vested interests it affects. There are considerable areas in the United States where even the pretence of liberal procedures has been abandoned. In particular places, capital and labour stand in the posture almost of armed gladiators to one another. The unity of the nation is threatened because the idea of liberty means something so different to the business men on the one hand and the masses on the other. The former remember only their past triumphs; the latter remember only their present sufferings. Sometimes, as one listens to the protagonists on either side, they seem to have ceased to speak a common language. Everywhere there are confusion and uncertainty; and the episodic improvisations that are born of these. Where what is called for is a planning of the foundations, there is no more than an incoherent drift half-afraid of its own tempo. Here, as with ourselves, the relations of production are out of harmony with the forces of production; and in America, as in Great Britain, the vested interests of privilege stand in the way of organized adjustment. I do not venture to embark on prophecy. But this, at least, it is worth saying. Either contemporary America must re-

vitalize the concepts of liberalism speedily enough to provide a new philosophy for its new world, or there will be an attack there upon the democratic principle as thoroughgoing as the ugliest we have seen in Europe. That is the choice made by the failure of doctrine to adapt itself to changed conditions. It is a choice that cannot be long postponed.

#### IV

Liberalism, I am saying, came as a doctrine of negation. It denied the validity of barriers which stood in the way of individual ascent. It cleared the way of those barriers, and assumed that anyone could move along the road so cleared. When it discovered that the right to liberty of contract which was its central affirmation still left great masses in poverty and ignorance, it approached the changed world timidly. It refused to confront squarely the fact that this changed world demanded, especially in the economic realm, massive social controls if the freedom it deemed the supreme good was to have meaning in the lives of the multitude; and it refused, also, to confront the fact that social control means social planning. It embarked upon half-hearted concessions; it did not re-examine its constitutive principle. It did not do so because it was afraid to lose the constituency through whose support it had come to power. Liberalism believed that its procedures were eternal. It failed to understand that no procedures have that quality unless men who live by them accept the results to which they give birth. And, in an epoch like ours, where it is essentially the validity of the results that is challenged, nothing is gained by emphasizing the

implicit with immense creativeness. May we learn from our perils to embark upon the task while it may still be attempted by men who understand one another. For the way of common understanding is the highroad to permanent achievement.

